

# Star-Telegram

## New federal drivers license requirements might bring back long lines at Texas DPS

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Over the last few years, the Texas Department of Public Safety has tried to reduce wait times for driver licensing by opening “mega centers” around the state.

In some places, folks can “get in line, online” and learn by text message when they should come in for that license.

But a federal takeover of driver licensing rules is underway. Three Texas congressmen, Reps. John Carter, R-Temple; John Culberson, R-Houston; and Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, may soon have a part in making lines at DPS offices much longer.

The REAL ID Act is a federal law passed in 2005 designed to coerce states into producing a U.S. national ID.

The law’s standards for driver’s licenses and non-driver IDs include forcing drivers to present multiple documents for proof of identity, proof of legal presence and proof of Social Security Number.

Full compliance with the federal law would also require Texas to share drivers’ personal data and documents with every other motor vehicle bureau in the country through a nationwide network of databases.

Texas is currently non-compliant with REAL ID. Like most states, it has an “extension” given by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

But DHS has been getting more aggressive about the national ID effort. It recently announced that the Transportation Security Administration will turn away travelers from non-compliant states starting in January 2018.

By October 2020, TSA won’t accept a driver’s license that’s not issued according to the federal government’s standards. That means longer lines at DPS offices, including “mega centers.”

Carter is the chairman of the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the DHS.

Culberson and Cuellar also serve on that committee. These men have as much power to affect the lines at the DPS for the worse as any state official.

If even a portion of Texas’s roughly 16 million licensed drivers have to come through the DPS in the next four years, those lines are going to be long.

Congress passed the REAL ID Act in 2005 with no hearings and little debate.

Proponents frequently tout the act as having been in a recommendation of the 9/11 Commission. In fact, REAL ID repealed legislation passed to fulfill Commission recommendations.

REAL ID canceled a negotiated process that was bringing together state and federal officials, privacy groups and liberty groups to shape ID policy. Instead, the REAL ID Act ordered a one-size-fits-all federal mandate.

Since then, appropriators like Carter, Culberson and Cuellar have funded REAL ID year over year over year.

The Cato Institute has found that, on average, Congress appropriated and DHS spent about \$50 million per year on REAL ID from 2008 to 2011.

Starting in 2011, REAL ID was folded into a \$1 billion-per-year “State Homeland Security Grant Program” that reduced public oversight of federal spending on the national ID program.

But the funds are flowing. And they’re paying for a program that may make the lines at the Texas DPS longer in the next few years.

Refusing to fund REAL ID implementation would reduce federal spending in a way that makes life simpler for Texans, with no cost to our national security.

Texans should hold Carter, Culberson and Cuellar accountable for their spending choices. They could do better than to let taxpayer money go into a murky fund that helps build national ID databases and lengthen the lines at the Texas Department of Public Safety.

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