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Don't blame the feds

After an outpouring of complaints, Gov. Mitch Daniels has eased requirements for renewing an Indiana driver's license after Jan. 1. But state officials are still using misinformation to push Hoosiers to meet unnecessarily stringent requirements.

According to a news release issued by the governor's office Wednesday, "States are required to begin issuing compliant cards in January 2010, and the federal government has mandated that states complete their compliance by the end of 2016."

Not so, according to Jim Harper, director of Information Policy Studies for the Washington-based Cato Institute. The federal government doesn't *require* the states to do anything under the Real ID act, passed in reaction to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"If your governor says that he is 'required' to do anything by Real ID, he's trying to avoid his responsibility to protect the privacy and civil liberties of Indiana residents from federal government incursions," Harper said in an e-mail. "That's shameful."

Contrary to popular opinion, government-issued ID is not required to board an airplane. According to the Web site of the Transportation Security Administration, passengers who "do not or cannot present an acceptable ID will have to provide information to verify their identity" and "may be subject to additional screening." Harper, in fact, has flown without ID and cleared security more quickly than on occasions when he showed his driver's license.

Neither is ID required to enter federal buildings under the Real ID law, said Harper, a member of the Department of Homeland Security's privacy advisory committee. At many federal buildings, no ID is required to enter, he said.

There are no federal mandates because many states have objected to the federal proposals. The Obama administration has offered a less-restrictive proposal with its Pass ID plan, but even that plan – still under debate – is not as restrictive as Indiana's driver's license requirements, which require verification of birth certificates with the originating agency.

Andy Miller, commissioner of the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles, flew around the state last month to unveil Indiana's SecureID initiative, in which all driver's licenses will be issued from a centralized office after applicants present a minimum of four pieces of identification to prove identity, Social Security number, Indiana residency and lawful U.S. status.

Miller cited concerns for identity theft and security threats. The new requirements drew immediate fire from advocacy groups such as AARP Indiana and the Indiana League of Women Voters, which protested because of the burden the ID requirements placed on older Hoosiers and women, who would have to produce additional documentation to verify name changes. Democratic Party officials also complained, noting that the requirements were another stumbling block to voting in a state that already has the most restrictive voter ID laws in the nation.

In response, Daniels announced Wednesday that two types of ID will be available for Hoosiers renewing licenses or ID cards – one that is "federally compliant" and one that is not. The former must meet the previously announced SecureID requirements; the latter will require applicants only to show their current ID card or driver's license.



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Cameron MacKenzie of Fort Wayne has his driver's license photo taken at the Pine Valley license branch in this photo from 2007. Beginning in January, licenses will no longer be issued at branches but instead will be mailed from a central location where all identification requirements will be verified.

Those who request the non-compliant card must sign an affidavit noting that they "understand that the card may limit their ability to board airplanes and enter federal buildings at some point in the future." The affidavit requirement will undoubtedly frighten many Hoosiers into taking unnecessary steps to obtain a SecureID. New residents will have no choice but to do so.

In the end, the governor seems to have recognized that the new requirements threatened license branch improvements. The tough ID requirements are almost guaranteed to create confusion and inconvenience when they go into effect in January.

"Our BMV is now nationally recognized for its short visit times and friendly customer service, and we intend to keep it that way," Daniels said.

Improved customer service is something the governor can claim with pride. But blaming the federal government for non-existent requirements is disingenuous. If the governor wants Hoosiers to take extra steps to prove their identity, he should say so himself.

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