

# Washington state has until October 2018 to get Real

*Gemma Alexander*

The 2017 Thanksgiving travel rush is history, and Seattle's SeaTac Airport, the nation's ninth busiest, handled the crowds admirably. But next Thanksgiving could see a far different outcome if Washington state doesn't get in line with federal requirements for fliers' IDs. The clock is ticking for Washington state to comply with the federal Real ID program, which requires that state driver's licenses and ID cards used to board commercial flights have security enhancements and be issued only to people who can prove they are legally in the United States. Washington, along with several other states, has resisted the Real ID requirements for years. Now the Evergreen State has been granted a final extension to October 2018 to achieve compliance.

## Real ID Act

The federal [Real ID Act](#) was passed in 2005 as a response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The [19 terrorists](#) involved in 9/11 held 63 valid state IDs and driver's licenses – and three of the them were in the United States illegally. The Real ID Act created a uniform set of requirements for state-issued identification: proof of identity, proof of residence, and proof of legal immigration status. It also required states to participate in a national database that would share all the information contained on issued IDs and licenses. Almost immediately, the Real ID Act met significant resistance from the states. As a result, implementation has been repeatedly pushed back, and rulemaking has modified the initial requirements (removing some controversial elements and adding others, like the possibility of sharing data with foreign nations.)

## State resistance

Concerns about the Real ID Act spanned the political spectrum. Many states objected to it as yet another unfunded mandate imposed by the federal government. Others maintained that it encroached on states' rights and/or that it generated additional bureaucracy and constituted an [invasion](#) of privacy that could be employed to track the movements of American [citizens](#). Still other critics argued that Real ID data could be misused to discriminate against racial minorities, immigrants, and the homeless.

Nearly half of all states took [action](#) in opposition to Real ID; [Washington](#) and many other states passed laws prohibiting Real ID implementation.

Over time, the states have taken a more conciliatory tone. Roughly half are now [compliant](#), while Washington and 16 others received an [extension](#) to complete implementation of the Real ID Act. Washington currently offers compliant “[enhanced](#)” licenses and ID cards for a fee, while continuing to issue standard, noncompliant, licenses. And it remains the [only state](#) that does not require proof of immigration status to obtain a standard license.

## **Practical Effects**

Washington’s two-tiered licensing system was signed into [law](#) earlier this year. Beginning next year, standard licenses will be labeled as noncompliant. Residents with those licenses will have to present other forms of identification – such as a passport, permanent-resident card, or military ID – for any federal purposes or to board commercial aircraft. The likely upshot will be confused and angry passengers and snarled lines at the airport – a *real* ID problem if there ever was one.