

Getting a state ID or driver's license

Moderate · 1–3 hours, including the office visit · \$–\$\$

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Proof of your full legal name and date of birth, like a birth certificate or passport
- ☐ Proof of your Social Security number: the card, or a W-2, SSA-1099, non-SSA-1099 or pay stub showing it
- ☐ Two proofs of where you live, like a lease, bank statement or official mail
- ☐ Proof of lawful status
- ☐ The fee (it varies by state)
- ☐ A checklist from your state's licensing agency website

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 Go to your state's driver's licensing agency website first.** It lists exactly which documents it requires, and states can add requirements to the federal minimum. DHS's REAL ID page has a map that links to every state's and territory's DMV, plus a quick quiz on whether you're ready to fly.
- 2 Gather the documents.** For a REAL ID, you'll need at least proof of your full legal name, date of birth, Social Security number, two proofs of address and lawful status.
- 3 No Social Security card?** DHS says a W-2, an SSA-1099, a non-SSA-1099 or a pay stub with your name and Social Security number can verify it. Your state may still have its own rules, so check its list.
- 4 Ask for a REAL ID-compliant card if you'll fly.** Every state now issues them. A compliant card has a marking at the top, usually a star. Without one, it won't be accepted for boarding a commercial flight.
- 5 Make an appointment if your state offers them, and bring every document on your state's list.** For the photo, a religious head covering is allowed if it doesn't hide your face or cast a shadow.
- 6 Keep your temporary paper license if they give you one, but don't count on it at the airport.** TSA doesn't accept a temporary driver's license as ID.
- 7 When the card comes, check that your name and date of birth are right, then store your documents together somewhere safe.**

Watch out Since May 7, 2025, airports no longer accept state licenses and IDs that aren't REAL ID-compliant. You need a compliant card or another accepted ID, like a passport. Since February 1, 2026, travelers without an accepted ID can pay a \$45 fee to use TSA ConfirmID, but if TSA can't verify who you are, you won't get through the checkpoint.

DAD NOTE Make a folder for your birth certificate and Social Security card. Know where it is. You'll need it more than you think.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/legal/important-documents/getting-a-state-id-or-drivers-license/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Transportation Security Administration; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.