

# What is a REAL ID?

**Passed by Congress in 2005, the REAL ID Act provides an added layer of security and verification for the most common forms of identification: state-issued driver licenses and ID cards.**

As of May 7, 2025, a REAL ID is required for domestic air travel and entering secure federal buildings unless you have another federally-approved ID (like a U.S. passport).

Unlike other forms of state-issued IDs, REAL IDs require individuals to submit documents proving their lawful presence in the United States. These documents are verified by the federal agency who issued them — typically through the U.S. Passport Verification Service (USPVS) or USCIS's Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE). State DMVs scan and retain copies of these documents for 10 years.

## **Does a REAL ID prove U.S. citizenship?**

Nope. In addition to U.S. citizens, Green Card holders and people with certain types of visas are lawfully present and eligible to obtain REAL IDs (varying somewhat by state).

No state offers REAL IDs only to U.S. citizens. While a few states offer specific types of REAL IDs that indicate citizenship (more on this below), there is no state where a REAL ID proves U.S. citizenship.

## Which states have REAL ID?

All 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, offer REAL IDs. But there are important distinctions:

Some states require residents to get a REAL ID if they're eligible. But most — nearly 80% — make it optional, and allow residents to pick between a REAL and a standard ID.

States also have flexibility in the proof of lawful presence documents they accept. Some accept residents with temporary visas, while others require more permanent forms of lawful presence: U.S. citizenship, a Green Card, or asylee/refugee status.

## Are there state-issued IDs that prove U.S. citizenship?

One form of state-issued ID — called an [Enhanced ID](#) — does prove U.S. citizenship, and can be used for land crossings into Canada and Mexico. But they are only offered in five states: Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, and Washington.

In the last few years, a handful of states have begun including a U.S. citizenship indicator on their ID cards. But in most states, no ID — REAL or standard — definitively indicates citizenship.

## Why do REAL IDs keep coming up in voting proof of citizenship bills?

During recent coverage of state and federal bills that would require documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) to register to vote or cast a ballot — and often in the bills themselves — many people mistakenly believe that REAL IDs prove U.S. citizenship.

This likely stems from confusion between a REAL ID itself, and the documents residents must provide when applying for a REAL ID. While a REAL ID doesn't prove U.S. citizenship, many of the documents used to prove lawful presence do:

- U.S. passports or passport cards (except those issued to U.S. Nationals),
- Certified birth certificates issued by a U.S. state or territory (except American Samoa),
- Certificates of U.S. naturalization or citizenship (N-550, N-750, N-578, N-560 or N-561),
- Consular Reports of Birth Abroad (FS240),
- U.S. Citizen Identification Card (I-179 or I-197), and
- ID cards issued by Tribal governments.

Because states maintain these documents, there is no need to place an additional, duplicative proof of citizenship burden on eligible voters. And there's no need to include the federal government as a middle man. Instead, state election officials should use the information they already have to verify U.S. citizenship.

# **BOTTOM** *Line:*

**a REAL ID, on its own, does not prove U.S. citizenship.**