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One Million New Mexico residents now carry a Real ID-Compliant driver's license or ID.

That's an important milestone given the federal deadline that is just a little over a year away. Starting Oct. 1, 2020, every air traveler will need a Real ID-compliant license or ID to fly within the United States. While valid passports and some other documents will also be accepted, many people rely on their driver's licenses and IDs to pass through TSA checkpoints.

Some 70 percent of New Mexico licenses and ID cards carry the gold star that marks them as being Real ID-compliant.

Getting to this point wasn't always easy. New Mexico began issuing Real ID-compliant credentials in November 2016, and the stricter federal requirements caused longer wait times at MVD as well as confusion centered on which documents could prove identity, identification number and residency.

"MVD has come a long way since launching New Mexico's new driver's license and identification card program in 2016. We really appreciate the patience and feedback we received from customers, employees and others during this process. It helped us improve," said MVD Director Alicia Ortiz. "Everyone on the MVD team has heard the voice of our customers and worked hard to help people get the appropriate credentials as easily as possible."

The one-millionth license was issued to a customer at the MVD Express office in Rio Rancho on Wednesday, June 5.

As always, New Mexico residents who do not need or want a Real ID-compliant identification can choose to apply for a credential that does not meet the federal standards. As a result of legislation sponsored by Senators Gerald Ortiz y Pino and Daniel Ivey-Soto and signed by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, these credentials will be called Standard Licenses and Identification Cards after October 1, 2019 (they have previously been called Driving Authorization Cards). The process to obtain one of these credentials has been made easier as part of a settlement with a coalition of community groups and the new law.

"I applaud the Legislature and Governor Lujan Grisham for enacting Senate Bill 278. The bill allows New Mexico to issue Real ID-compliant licenses and IDs to residents who want them, while streamlining the process to receive a Standard License or Identification Card for others," said Secretary of Taxation and Revenue Stephanie Schardin Clarke.

If your driver's license or identification card expires before October 1, 2020, there's no need to rush to an MVD location. You can renew it as your expiration date approaches. If your driver's license or identification card expires after October 1, 2020, and you think you'll need a Real ID-compliant credential, then you'll need to complete your application process before that date.

"Depending on a person's situation, it may take some time to pull together all the documents needed to get a Real ID. I would encourage people to be prepared with enough time to meet their needs," said Director Ortiz. "And if a person doesn't need or isn't eligible for a Real ID, their current driver's license or identification card can still be used to drive or as a valid form of identification until it expires, even if that's after the Real ID deadline."

The most common cause for delay in receiving any type of credential from MVD is arriving without all required documents. Residents can find out more about how to obtain a Real ID-compliant driver's license or ID, as well as the current non-federally compliant credentials at mvd.newmexico.gov. A complete list of acceptable IDs to board flights is available at tsa.gov/real-id.