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REAL ID Rollout in USVI Still Pending as TSA Programming Continues

The U.S. Virgin Islands has delayed issuing new REAL IDs until TSA completes programming. While the update is pending, residents can still use passports, passport cards, and other valid federal IDs for domestic travel and federal facility access.

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The V.I. Bureau of Motor Vehicles has announced a delay in the issuance of newly designed REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses and identification cards until the Transportation Security Administration confirms the updated cards are programmed into its nationwide verification system.

According to a press release issued Monday, BMV Director Barbara Jackson-McIntosh stated that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's TSA has advised the BMV that the new U.S. Virgin Islands REAL ID credentials will be uploaded into the TSA database in April 2025, ahead of the federal deadline of May 7, 2025, after which the REAL ID will be required for certain forms of domestic travel.

The delay in card issuance comes as a result of significant changes to the REAL ID card's design, layout, and security features, which were updated in accordance with industry standards and anti-counterfeit protections. The updated credentials were sent to TSA for inclusion in its computer data library, which is used at security checkpoints to verify the identity of passengers presenting REAL IDs, BMV said.

Once the new cards are integrated into TSA systems, agents will be able to scan the cards and validate the information electronically.

Until the TSA notifies the BMV that the cards are officially recognized and readable by its systems, the U.S. Virgin Islands will not distribute the updated REAL IDs. Ms. McIntosh stressed that this precaution is being taken to avoid any confusion or travel complications.

"We did not want to issue the cards and then you may have been denied traveling or [subjected to] unnecessary scrutiny because the TSA employees would not have known that the VI has a new card design," said McIntosh.

In the meantime, Virgin Islanders holding other valid federal travel documents—including a U.S. Passport, Passport Card, Green Card, or similar documentation—can use those credentials for domestic air travel and security screenings.

For those who have been issued a non-REAL ID license or ID card, BMV will automatically reissue a REAL ID once the TSA integration is confirmed. Impacted individuals will be notified when it is time to return to BMV offices to collect their updated credentials.

Importantly, holders of current, valid REAL IDs do not need to take any action, according to Director McIntosh. "If you currently have a valid REAL ID, there is no need to update the card," she stated. "The current REAL ID is valid for travel and driving; this only affects persons whose ID or driver's license has expired and needs to be renewed."

Senator Ray Fonseca has called for a Committee of the Whole hearing to address the Real ID Act's implementation in the Virgin Islands. In a letter dated March 24 to Senate President Milton E. Potter, Fonseca requested a public forum to provide clear communication from government agencies and stakeholders.

"This is not just about identification—it's about access to air travel, federal buildings, and critical services," Fonseca said. "Our residents deserve clarity and peace of mind."

He spoke of the importance of transparency, stating, "This hearing would serve as an important step in ensuring a smooth transition and informed compliance across the Territory."

The proposed hearing would aim to provide official updates, explain the process to residents, and address any community concerns about the rollout.

For additional information or clarification, the BMV encourages residents to contact them through the agency's website at bmv.vi.gov and use the "Contact" feature. Appointments can also be made online or by calling the respective district offices: St. Croix: 340-713-4268; St. Thomas: 340-774-

4268; St. John: 340-776-6262.

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