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Record of publication of editorial from the Tampa Tribune dealing with driver license issuance. The article discusses Real ID, the state closing offices and fee increases passed onto motorists.

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## License renewal headaches

By **TBO.com**

Our letter writers frequently and understandably fume about the elaborate paperwork involved when renewing their driver's licenses.

The well-intended federal law behind it, like so many Washington rules, lacks common sense.

Federal regulators should allow more flexibility.

Hillsborough Tax Collector Doug Belden, whose office handles most of the local driver's license renewals for the state, says the law is particularly burdensome for senior citizens, who may not have ready access to the original documents required by the law.

Slightly more than 20 percent of renewals are now rejected because of a lack of paperwork.

This wastes the time of those seeking the renewal and the time of the workers serving them.

And making the license renewal process even more painful are the heavy fees the state lawmakers have imposed on driver's licenses, as a stealth method of generating revenue.

The state increased the price of a driver's license from \$24 to \$48 in 2009 and used the money primarily to augment general revenue. Lawmakers also began transferring responsibility for renewals from the state to county tax collectors, without providing any funding for that responsibility.

This essentially forced local governments to subsidize state operations. The tax collectors can collect a \$6.25 surcharge for license renewals, but it actually costs about twice that. So between the demanding state and the inflexible feds, local drivers are getting hammered. Unlike state and federal officials, Belden has to deal directly with citizens, and he shares their aggravation.

"We follow the letter of the law. But the federal government is inflexible," he says "... and lawmakers balanced the budgets on the backs of motorists."

The federal ID law, passed in 2005, set minimum identification standards for states. Now required for a license renewal are:

- One identification card such as a passport, birth certificate or green card. These must be original or certified copies.
- A verification of the Social Security number, such as a Social Security card or W-2 form, pay stub or other official paperwork that includes the number.
- Two documents providing an address, such as a deed, mortgage statement, and voter registration card. This is the requirement that most often trips up motorists, Belden says.

Moreover, women who have changed their names because of marriage or remarriage must bring a marriage certificate, divorce decree or court order.

Often, seniors do not have ready access to such documentation.

Belden rightly wants Washington to loosen the requirements, particularly for people who have lived in a residence many years. Addresses can be verified, he points out, from the tax rolls.

The country did need to toughen its identification laws after the 9-11 terrorist attack exposed how easy it was to obtain fake IDs. The 9/11 hijackers used dozens of fraudulently obtained state IDs to help execute their murderous plot.

Tougher ID requirements also guard against illegal immigration.

But there is no need to mindlessly treat someone who has lived in the same home for 30 years as a potential terrorist simply because she doesn't have old documents at hand.

Belden says some sensible exemptions, such as for the proof-of-residency mandates, would eliminate most of the problems.

And lawmakers, at the least, should reimburse counties for handling a state responsibility lawmakers want to shirk.

Federal and state policies would be more efficient if lawmakers would pay more attention to the local officials who deal with the public daily.

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