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Mr. Belden presented current DL situation before TBO Editorial Board and Mike Salinero. He outlined the difficulties HCTC and other collectors are faced with in regards to DL issuance.

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## Fees, red tape with Real ID Act irk Hillsborough tax collector

By Mike Salinero

Hillsborough County Tax Collector Doug Belden has joined the rising chorus opposing the Real ID Act that sets federal identification requirements for state-issued drivers' licenses.

Belden on Tuesday said the law imposes proof-of-identity requirements that are burdensome to drivers and costly to agencies that handle driver's license transactions, such as tax collectors.

For instance, applicants must now provide two documents proving their address. Women who have changed their names because of marriage or remarriage must bring a marriage certificate, a court order or divorce decree. Applicants with name changes must show documents that link the current name to one of the required primary identification documents, such as a birth certificates or passports.

The law, passed in May 2005, grew out of security concerns after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It has drawn fire from conservative and liberal groups as an invasion of privacy, amounting to a national identification card. Critics also say the law creates expensive red tape.

"It's one thing to protect us from potential attacks," Belden said. "It's another to be reasonable."

One in five people who apply for a driver's license at Hillsborough tax collector offices are rejected because they don't have sufficient documentation, Belden said. Most of the rejections are because applicants failed to bring two documents proving their address.

The new requirements come on top of fee increases passed by the Florida Legislature in 2009 that doubled the price of a driver's license from \$24 to \$48. Belden said the fee increases were passed to fill a budget hole without raising taxes.

None of the additional money went to the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles' budget. In fact, the Legislature cut the department's budget by \$125 million.

As a result of those cuts, the department is gradually turning over driver's license transactions to county tax collectors. The transfer will be complete by 2015.

Tax collectors can collect a \$6.25 surcharge to cover the cost of issuing the licenses. Belden said the real cost of a driver's license transaction is \$12 or \$13. That doesn't include the increased training his customer service representatives have to undergo because of the new federal requirements.

"You don't take a 100 percent fee increase and give nothing to the tax collectors," Belden said. "We need the \$12 to break even; we're not trying to make a profit."

Belden said the combination of burdensome requirements and the doubling of the license fee have raised security concerns in other counties. Some customers have become unruly over the sticker shock of the new license fee and the extra bureaucratic requirements.

At least 25 states have passed some type of legislation rejecting the requirements in the Real ID Act. In Florida, state Sen. Greg Evers, R-Crestview, filed a bill to eliminate many of the act's requirements, but it went nowhere. At the national level, bills have been introduced in Congress to amend the law or repeal it.

Belden said he is not banking on the federal law being changed. Instead, he wants Julie Jones, director of the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, to ask the U.S. Homeland Security Department to grant some exemptions, especially for the proof-of-residency requirements.

At the state level, Belden said, lawmakers should roll back the fee increases and give tax collectors more money to cover the cost of issuing licenses. That might not be realistic, though, because state finances are tighter now than when the fees were hiked in 2009.

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