

## **An Open Letter to Policymakers Regarding Drivers License Security**

February 28, 2007

The undersigned call on Congress to provide States with the resources they need to secure the identity documents they provide to U.S. citizens. As the Department of Homeland Security finalizes the specific requirements that States will be expected to implement to fulfill this recommendation of the 9/11 Commission, Congress must step up to the plate and make securing of identity documents the national priority that our citizens deserve. The undersigned bring their collective voice to call on Congress to fund this homeland security priority during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The 9/11 Commission Final Report recommendations on terrorist travel called for action to “set standards for the issuance” of State-issued identifications, including drivers licenses, and to “design a comprehensive screening system addressing common problems and set[] common standards with system-wide goals in mind.” The ease with which the 9/11 hijackers acquired State IDs—with no system in place that required identity verification—will continue to be a significant vulnerability unless States are certified to meet minimum standards for records’ safekeeping, issuance, processing of driver licenses and IDs.

The 9/11 hijackers assimilated into the United States by attaining 17 drivers licenses from Arizona, California and Florida and 13 state-issued IDs from Florida, Virginia and Maryland. The hijackers then used those IDs for the purpose of renting cars, obtaining living quarters, opening bank accounts, and boarding aircraft. At least six hijackers presented State-issued IDs to airline employees on the morning of 9/11.

In December 2005, the 9/11 Commissioners gave Congress a good mark for passing into law solid language pertaining to its identity security recommendations in the 2004 Intelligence Reform Act and 2005 REAL ID Act. However, the Commissioners remained concerned at the States’ ability to comply, stating: “The REAL ID Act has established by statute standards for state-issued IDs acceptable for federal purposes, though States’ compliance needs to be closely monitored.” Building State competency in this area will be at best incomplete if States fail to receive the necessary federal funds for establishing an identity security system within and between their jurisdictions.

All States and the federal government rely on the quality of State documents, meaning our national security is at risk until all States implement systems to ensure that applicants are who they claim to be and have a legitimate status in the United States.

In addition, a comprehensive system to improve the quality of the vetting and issuance system for State-issued identification documents will provide benefits for Americans far beyond national security. Identity security means less opportunity for those who seek to fraudulently acquire or forge State-issued identifications for nefarious purposes, including traditional white and blue collar crime, scam-artists and identity thieves, dead-beat dads, and even teenagers trying to purchase alcohol. Over the past couple of decades, Congress has mandated rules on HAZMAT driver license issuance; drunk drivers; driver safety training; and information sharing on problem drivers—all in the federal interest of public safety.

A quantum leap in enhancing our national and economic security and our public safety is within our grasp if Congress is willing to partner with the States and invest adequately in identity security systems. The undersigned stand ready to support federal and States' efforts to infuse credibility and reliability into our most basic identity documents and issuance systems.

The National Governors Association, the National Conference on State Legislatures, and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators developed a request for federal funding after completing a comprehensive evaluation of the upgrades and new procedures that likely will be required in jurisdictions around the country. The undersigned thus call on Congress to provide States with at least the \$1 billion in “one time upfront costs” sought by NGA, NCSL, and AAMVA to comply with regulatory requirements to be issued in 2007 to facilitate identity document security improvements.

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