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KYTC to take over statewide licensing, ID responsibilities

By Jacob Mulliken Messenger-Inquirer
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Rep. Sal Santoro

Gov. Andy Beshear signed a bill on Friday that will have the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet take over all licensing and identification responsibilities of Kentucky's Circuit Courts.

House Bill 453, sponsored by Sal Santoro, a Florence Republican will, according to the bill, make KYTC the sole application and issuance entity for operator's licenses and personal identification cards while eliminating the requirements that these documents be applied for in one's county of residence. The bill will also expand the pre-existing list of documents an applicant can use when applying, and allow applicants to choose between four to eight years before renewal.

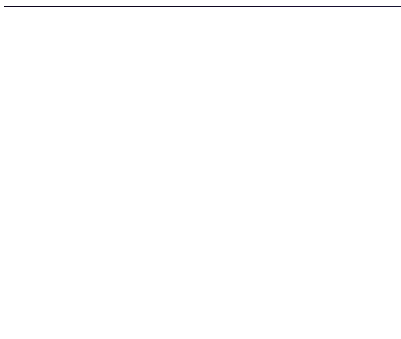
Circuit clerk's offices will continue issuing standard identification credentials until the KYTC determines that one of their 18 to 24 budgeted regional offices are capable of assuming all issuance duties. All Circuit Courts will be required to cease issuing licenses and personal ID cards by June 30, 2022.

With the launch two years out and the Federal Government's REAL ID enforcement date of Oct. 1 being pushed back to Oct. 1, 2021; the KYTC has ample time to prepare. This legislation is the final step in implementing the REAL ID Act, said Santoro.

"This is a federal mandate that is coming down to us," he said.

"Following some problems with the initial REAL ID rollout with the Circuit Courts, the decision was made to move REAL ID to KYTC in regional offices; recently, it was determined REAL ID and all standard licenses to KYTC. Through a lot of meetings with the Kentucky Association of Circuit Court Clerks, they want to get out of the business of administering licenses."

There are three key aspects to the bill that will begin in July that will require the KYTC to accept all forms of payment, including cash and personal checks, require the cabinet to establish no less than eight Saturday operations hours a month in its locations, and establish a mobile licensing unit that will go around the state at a minimum of twice a year to provide mobile licensing services, said Sarah Jackson, REAL ID project manager.



The ultimate decision to transition all identification and licensing responsibilities to the KYTC was made jointly by the cabinet, Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts and Kentucky Association of Circuit Court Clerks. With the signing of the bill, Circuit Courts around the state will lose the roughly \$5 million appropriation they receive annually through restricted fund drivers license revenue and will, over the next two years, eliminate 137 deputy clerk positions throughout the state. However, many of these lost positions should aid in the state's circuit clerk attrition issues, leaving roughly 35 employees, dealing solely with issuing licenses, potentially displaced. The move will bring Kentucky more in line with other states, said AOC Director Laurie Dudgeon during a House Transportation meeting on March 3.

"Kentucky is the only court system that issues identification documents," she said. "This brings us more in line with the way the rest of the country does it. The judicial branch supports it. This has a negative impact when we lose revenue, of course, but we have a staffing study in place and we have 47 offices that are understaffed. We can't just abolish positions, so we are figuring out how to reallocate these positions. We have talked to staff and we think the concern is premature. In Jefferson County, they have 20 vacant positions every month. There will be opportunities for people to be re-employed."

Ultimately, the move is meant to streamline the process and make the regional offices a one-stop shop for the identification needs of the commonwealth while fulfilling the needs of the AOC, KYTC and CCA. The cabinet is even working toward rolling out a mobile option to renew licenses, said Santoro.

"We are hoping that we will be able to, within the next eight years, have people use their cell phones to renew," he said, "eliminating long lines at offices and making it easier on everybody. With mobile offices and everything being under one roof, it will be an easier process. With REAL IDs, it was the logical next step."

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