

NEWS



The new 'blue card' issued by the Cherokee Nation includes a photograph of the member and his or her tribal ID number.

Cherokee Nation Issue New Photo ID; Card Does Not Meet Oklahoma Voter ID Criteria

Brian Daffron • October 31, 2012

“I’ve presented my photo tribal citizenship card at several major airports, and even to the U.S. Secret Service, and experienced no problems whatsoever,” Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker said in a tribally-issued press release. “Producing a government-issued, photo ID helps to instill a greater sense of pride in our people and decrease the possibility of fraud or misuse of the traditional ‘blue card.’”

According to a press release issued by the Cherokee Nation, more than a year of planning went into the creation of the new Blue Card. Additional information provided to Indian Country Today Media Network by Cherokee Nation Businesses said that input on the photo IDs was sought by Cherokee Nation from the other “Five Civilized Tribes,” which would historically include the Muscogee Creek Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation and Seminole Nation.

In addition to photo ID and enrollment number, the card will also have the signatures of the Cherokee Nation registrar, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief and the signature of the cardholder. A hologram bearing the seal of the Cherokee Nation is also within the card, and cardholders can opt for their Bureau of Indian Affairs Certificate Degree of Indian Blood on the reverse side.

“Our traditional blue cards weren’t laminated or as durable as the new cards are,” Cherokee Nation Registrar Linda O’Leary said in the release. “Previously, citizens carried two different cards for proof of Native American ancestry, but now it can all be printed onto one card. These government-issued, photo IDs will be useful for more than just Cherokee Nation services, and it only takes a moment inside the registration office to get the photo and print the ID.”

There are many circumstances in today’s post-September 11 world where more than one state-issued photo ID is needed. These include applying for a bank loan and applying for a job. Therefore, many government institutions—including federally recognized tribes—are creating photo IDs. Beginning this month, the Cherokee Nation—the largest Native American tribe—now issues a new version of their tribal enrollment card, known as the “Blue Card,” as a photo ID complete with tribal enrollment number.

Issuing of the new cards began in September, with Cherokee Nation tribal citizens who serve as employees being the pilot program. At press time, Cherokee Nation Director of Communications Amanda Clinton stated that 2,778 cards have been issued.

The Cherokee Nation's tribal jurisdiction includes 14 counties in northeast Oklahoma. According to Oklahoma law, a tribal ID can be included as part of its voter ID requirement. However, the tribal ID has to have an expiration date later than the date that someone goes to the polls to vote. The new blue cards issued by the Cherokee Nation, said Clinton, do not have expiration dates.

"[The new tribal IDs] are issued indefinitely," said Clinton. "Of course, if a person gets an ID at a young age, has a legal name change, change of address, or his or her appearance changes dramatically, that person may want to have a new photo taken."

When asked by ICTMN about Cherokee Nation's position on Oklahoma voter ID laws requiring the expiration date, Clinton stated that tribal members with these new IDs should use their "best judgment."

"The primary goal of photo tribal citizenship cards was to give our citizens a more sophisticated, professional grade ID when seeking services from the Cherokee Nation," said Clinton. "While we're finding this ID to be accepted in many other scenarios, it is a new program. Keeping that in mind, we would definitely ask our citizens to use their best judgment when presenting their photo ID in new or unfamiliar situations."

Clinton said that there was a great deal of support throughout the tribal constituency to create the new IDs. Because tribal members live throughout the United States, Cherokee Nation will also have "mobile units" to issue the new Blue Cards in large population centers throughout the country. The first two mobile unit stops were scheduled to occur for California, at Thousand Oaks on October 27 and at San Diego on October 28.

In November, the mobile units will make their way to the Southwest, with November 10 visits in both Tucson and Phoenix, Ariz., and continuing to Albuquerque, N.M. on November 11.

For more information on the new Blue Cards, visit the Cherokee Nation website at www.cherokee.org.