

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Background on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative

Passed by Congress and signed into law by the president as part of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) will require all people entering the United States, including U.S. citizens, to present a passport or an approved document that shows their identity and citizenship.

The WHTI changes take full effect June 1, 2009, when U.S. citizens entering by land or sea will have to prove their identity and citizenship with a passport, passport card or WHTI-compliant document, such as a state-issued enhanced driver's license.

The Michigan's Secretary of State's Office is creating an optional enhanced driver's license that meets WHTI's stringent identification and citizenship requirements.

The goal of the initiative is to strengthen U.S. border security while smoothing entry for U.S. citizens and legitimate visitors. The standardized documentation required under WHTI allows the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to quickly and reliably identify people entering the United States. The changes were among the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission.

Since Jan. 31, 2008, people entering the United States by land or sea have had to present either a passport, passport card or WHTI-compliant document; or a government-issued ID, such as a driver's license, along with proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate. Before Jan. 31, 2008, U.S. and Canadian citizens were able to declare their citizenship to cross the border.

U.S., Canadian, Mexican and Bermudan citizens entering the United States via air travel from the Western Hemisphere have had to present a passport or secure travel document since January 2007.

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