



pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

New Law Provides Free IDs for Pennsylvanians Experiencing Homelessness

By Diego Sandino

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) today said that Pennsylvanians experiencing homelessness are now able to obtain a free initial photo ID or renewal a photo ID as a result of Act 131 of 2020, which Governor Tom Wolf signed into law in late 2020.

“This new law makes significant changes to increasing many of our residents’ independence, ultimately enhancing their quality of life,” said PennDOT Secretary Yassmin Gramian.

“All Pennsylvanians deserve access to the basic needs we all have: adequate food, safe housing, quality health care and clean water. Eliminating barriers to basic needs for individuals experiencing homelessness is simply the right thing to do,” DHS Secretary Teresa Miller said. “I applaud the General Assembly, Governor Wolf and PennDOT for their collaboration on a project that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of Pennsylvanians.”

To obtain an ID at no cost, individuals experiencing homelessness must apply in person at a PennDOT Driver License Center and must meet identification and other requirements. The applicant must inform the Driver License Center counter staff they are applying for or renewing their existing Pennsylvania photo ID and are requesting a free ID due to their homeless status. The individual will be required to certify on the application that they are homeless as defined in Section 103 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

For initial issuance of a photo ID, the applicant must bring one acceptable proof of identification (see Publication 195US or Publication 195NC), Social Security Card or Social Security Administration ineligibility letter and acceptable form/s of address verification. In the case of homeless individuals, PennDOT will accept a letter from a shelter indicating an individual is staying at the shelter or uses the shelter as an address of residency to pick up mail.

For renewal of a photo ID, the applicant must renew at one of PennDOT Driver License Centers. The applicant will be required to certify on the application that they are homeless, and a fee will be waived at the time of the renewal.

The law covers initial issuance and renewals for photo IDs for those who qualify for free issuance due to their homeless status. Duplicate IDs are not covered under the law change. Duplicate fees continue to apply and cannot be waived. The law does not cover nor does it allow for waiver of any driver license product-related fees.

“Difficulty getting IDs, including because of lack of funds, is a huge barrier for many of our clients who are homeless, and not having an ID makes it very difficult to get housing, to get medical care, to find a job, and to get other types of help,” Amy Hirsch, Managing Attorney for Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, said. “Getting an ID is a tremendously important step forward for people who are homeless that helps people stabilize their lives, and take care of themselves and their children. We are excited that this program removes the barrier caused by needing to pay for a state ID.”

Additional information can be found on the Driver and Vehicle Services website, www.dmv.pa.gov. Driver and vehicle online services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and include driver’s license, photo ID and vehicle registration renewals; driver-history services; changes of address; driver license and vehicle registration restoration letters; ability to pay driver license or vehicle insurance restoration fee; driver license and photo ID duplicates; and driver exam scheduling. There are no additional fees for using online services.

Help is available for Pennsylvanians who need help with paying for food, accessing health care, and other essential needs. Applications for public assistance programs can be submitted online at www.compass.state.pa.us. Those who prefer to submit paper documentation can pick one up from their local County Assistance Office (CAO), print it from the website, or requested by phone at 1-800-692-7462. While CAOs remain closed to the public, paper applications can be returned via mail or dropped off in a CAO’s secure drop box, if available. You do not need to know your own eligibility in order to apply, and all Pennsylvanians are encouraged to apply for assistance so they do not have to weather these difficult times alone.

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