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Office of the Governor
NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Christie Whitman today signed legislation authorizing a 10-year digitized driver's license that will cost less, cut back on fraud and help law enforcement verify driver identities.

"New Jersey citizens deserve a state government that is efficient, a state government that treats each tax dollar with care, and a state government that protects against fraud and abuse. This bill does all of the above," said Gov. Whitman.

A-2623, sponsored by Assembly Members Guy R. Gregg (R- Sussex/Hunterdon/Morris), Joseph J. Roberts, Jr. (D- Camden/Gloucester) and Alex DeCroce (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic) and Senators Andrew R. Ciesla (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and Shirley K. Turner (D-Mercer), will be implemented over a four-year period beginning next year. Current licenses will still be valid until a driver is due to renew the license.

Under the new provisions, New Jersey licenses will have a digitized picture and signature. The new license will also allow driver's license information to be encoded on either a bar code or a magnetic stripe. Information that will be encoded on the new license and contained in a centralized database will be protected by State and federal driver's privacy protection laws, and will only include information that appears on the face of licenses.

The Governor said the new license will allow New Jersey to become more proactive in protecting colleges, bars, restaurants and citizens against fraud, while recognizing the privacy rights of drivers. The new license will protect against counterfeit licenses and will make it much more difficult for people to use fraudulent identities.

Driver pictures will be stored in a centralized database, making it easier for law enforcement to verify a driver's identity. Pictures will only be accessible to government agencies and private agencies working on behalf of them, including privatized Department of Motor Vehicle agencies, who have gotten the approval of the Director of the Division of Motor Vehicles.

"The new driver's license does more than allow someone to drive a car," said NJ Department of Transportation Commissioner James Weinstein. "The digitized license provides law enforcement, bar owners, and liquor stores with the secure document they need to deter underage drinking."

Weinstein said the digitized license provides convenience to New Jersey's 5.8 million licensed drivers by reducing the trips they need to make to a DMV office and by reducing the cost of the license.

Driver's will save money once they get the new picture license. The 10-year license will cost \$35. The annual cost of a driver's picture license will decrease from \$4.50 to \$3.50. In addition, drivers will be able to replace lost or stolen licenses by calling for a new one.

The bill aims to deter the fraudulent use of New Jersey licenses for things like underage drinking. Licensed drivers under the age of 21 will have a different color license and will have an under 21 identifier on the face of the license.

The legislation also cracks down on fraud by increasing the penalties for those who make, sell, intend to sell, possess or use fake licenses. Anyone convicted of any of these offenses will face a mandatory suspension of their driver's license for up to 2 years. In addition, anyone making, distributing, intending to sell or transferring a fake license will be guilty of a third degree crime. These offenses were previously considered fourth degree crimes. In addition, anyone who uses a fraudulent license will be guilty of a fourth degree crime instead of the previous disorderly person offense.

The legislation provides senior citizens and handicapped persons the option of either a 5 or a 10-year license. Additionally, seniors born prior to 1939 and the handicapped are not required to have a picture license.

Organ donation designations will now be electronically stored in a centralized database, in addition to being printed on driver's licenses. The Governor encouraged drivers to seriously consider donating an organ if they are in the position to do so.

The legislation also applies to identification cards, and license endorsements, including boat, motorcycle, and commercial driver's licenses.