

Visa Data to Be Included on Driver's Licenses Again

THE NEW YORK TIMES

October 31, 2007

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ALBANY, Oct. 30 — The state will revive the practice of putting visa expiration dates on foreign visitors' driver's licenses as part of a deal between the Spitzer administration and the Department of Homeland Security, an official said on Tuesday.

The official, David J. Swarts, the commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles, discussed the change when he was asked about licenses for immigrants after a demonstration of new facial-recognition and document-scanning technology that his agency will adopt in the coming months to root out fraud in and duplication of driver's licenses.

The change follows Gov. Eliot Spitzer's announcement last weekend that he was revising his much-criticized plan that would have allowed illegal immigrants to obtain the same licenses as citizens. The state will now move to a new three-tier driver's license system that complies with forthcoming federal security rules.

Immigrants' supporters and some lawmakers were already critical of Mr. Spitzer's deal with federal officials, saying that New York should offer only one kind of license to all residents, legal or not. Though the reinstatement of the temporary-visitor stamp will only last through the end of next year, Mr. Spitzer's latest decision drew further anger.

"This is like giving away the store," said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition.

The expiration dates were originally noted on drivers' licenses under a policy instituted under former governor George E. Pataki in 2004, when the Department of Motor Vehicles began putting "temporary visitor" marks on licenses issued to individuals with temporary visas, along with the date that those visas expired. Immigrants' advocates criticized the policy, saying that it encouraged discrimination even against legal immigrants and led to confusion about whether the licenses themselves were valid.

Mr. Spitzer ended the Pataki-era practice after his initial announcement on Sept. 21 that illegal immigrants would be allowed to obtain licenses beginning as early as December. At the time, the administration seemed to agree with the advocates, saying that the marking was pejorative and, in any case, would become superfluous when the new licensing policy went into effect later this year.

But under the deal struck last week with federal officials, New York will offer three types of licenses, including one that will meet new federal security standards, available only to citizens and legal immigrants.

Illegal immigrants will be able to get a different license, which would not be valid for air travel or for entering federal buildings. But such licenses will not be issued until the broader licensing plan goes into effect at the end of 2008. A third type of license will be available to only United States citizens who are New York State residents, which will be valid for crossing the Canadian border.

Because the whole program had been delayed, said Jennifer Givner, a spokeswoman for the governor, the administration had decided to delay the cancellation of the “temporary visitor” stamps.

“Given the announcement this weekend, and the idea to move toward three types of licenses, and delaying the implementation for one year, it’s in the best interest of safety to maintain the label,” she said.

Ms. Hong said the change would seriously inconvenience immigrants. She also said the stamps wrongly linked driving privileges with immigration status, something that Mr. Spitzer has rejected.

The stamps will not appear on standard licenses issued after 2008. Instead, those licenses, which will be available to citizens and illegal immigrants, will be marked “not valid for federal purposes.”

The temporary visitor stamp will still be used on licenses good for federal identification purposes that are issued to legal immigrants.