

Kentuckians will need vision screening to renew driver's license. Advocates, critics weigh in.

By JACK BRAMMER
The Kentucky Lantern

Starting Jan. 1, Kentucky motorists will need an eye exam — either from an eye specialist or a free one from the state — to renew their driver's license. The change in driver's licensing stems from a state law that was enacted in 2021 but does not take effect until 2025.

At the time of its passage by state lawmakers, the change received little opposition and much support from the medical community, law-enforcement officials and the American Automobile Association. Kentucky was the 43rd state to require vision screening to renew a driver's license, Kentucky Health News reported.

The state House approved the measure — House Bill 439 — on an 89-5 vote and the Senate approved it 31-4. Gov. Andy Beshear signed it into law that was to take effect July 2024. Implementation was delayed until Jan. 1, 2025 to give the state more time to prepare for it.

Now that the law is about ready to take effect, criticism is popping up.

There are about 650,000 Kentuckians due to renew their licenses in 2025, and many are finding out about the new requirement about vision screening in recent days through mailed flyers from the state Transportation Cabinet.

Rep. Savannah Maddox, R-Dry Ridge, on X, formerly known as Twitter, called the new law “nanny state hogwash.”

“Adding another layer of bureaucracy to the already complicated Real ID/regional office debacle is not the answer,” she said, referring to the federally compliant driver's license that can be used for boarding commercial airline flights, entering military bases and accessing federal buildings that require identification. Real ID enforcement begins May 7, 2025.

In a phone interview, Maddox said everyone wants safer roads but the state should “improve the way driver's licenses are delivered.” She said requiring an eye exam for all is an unnecessary burden since some people have no history of vision problems.

Maddox also contended that the new system of issuing driver's licenses at the state's 33 regional licensing offices does not appear to work as well as the process did in the past when the offices of circuit court clerks in each county issued driver's licenses. The issuance service transitioned from the circuit clerk offices in June 2022.

Sen. Lindsey Tichenor, R-Smithfield, said in a social media post that some argue that the vision test for all drivers is “unnecessary for individuals with a clean driving record and could lead to inconvenience and added costs for

routine renewals, potentially impacting access to driving for certain populations.”

But the bill's primary sponsor, Rep. Kim Moser, R-Taylor Mill, said its intent is to improve driver safety on Kentucky roads. “Data show that a decrease in visual acuity leads to more traffic accidents,” she said. “The vision of a 16-year-old who has an eye test to get a license is different from someone much older who wants to get a license renewed. Shouldn't there be some kind of evaluating every renewal?”

Moser said she had no immediate opinion about the work of the regional offices.

“I know many may say there is too much bureaucracy but say something differently when something could have been done to save their loves from loss of life or limb from a car accident,” she said.

Highway fatalities in Kentucky increased in 2023 with 813 deaths, up from 744 in 2022 and the highest since 2016.

“Clear vision is essential for making safe decisions on the road,” said Kentucky State Police driver testing branch commander Captain Chris Baker. “Mandatory vision screenings have been a longstanding requirement for all first-time drivers and expanding this to all drivers is a practical way to make roads safer for everyone.”

“Comprehensive eye exams are crucial for detecting impairments that could compromise driving ability, while also detecting other serious health conditions,” said Leslie Cecil, O.D., president of the Kentucky Optometric Association.

“This new vision screening requirement is a significant step in safeguarding public health and road safety. Our organization looks forward to collaborating with the Transportation Cabinet and other vision specialists to help implement these new requirements.”

How the new law works

Under the new law, Kentuckians would continue to have the choice of renewing their license every four or eight years, and a vision screening test would be necessary at each renewal. The cost for renewal will not increase. It now costs \$21.50 for a four-year standard license and \$43 for an eight-year standard license. Real ID licenses cost \$24 for four years and \$48 for eight years.

Drivers would have the choice of getting their screening at the renewal office or by a medical provider.

Starting in 2025, upon request, the medical professional will complete an approved state-issued form that he or she will give to the patient if they pass. The patient may bring the form to their license renewal visit if the form and exam were com-

pleted within 12 months of the license renewal visit. The driver will not need to take a vision screening at a regional office.

The free state screening involves looking into a box and answering questions about what is seen. It takes about a minute.

Anyone who failed the screening would be referred to a vision specialist for further evaluation before proceeding with license renewal. The visual acuity standard in Kentucky is 20/40 or better. After having their vision corrected, drivers must present a form signed by their vision specialist.

Kentuckians are encouraged to bring corrective lenses if conducting a vision screening at a regional office. A restriction will be placed on your license if you pass the vision screening while wearing glasses.

Online and mail-in driver's license renewal will still be available after Jan. 1, 2025, for Kentuckians who choose to complete a screening with a vision or qualifying medical specialist. The cardholder simply needs to upload the official, signed form provided by their medical professional when renewing on drive.ky.gov.

Existing state law allows Kentuckians to renew their driver's license up to 180 days (about six months) before their card expiration date.

It is strongly advised to renew early should any

corrective measures be needed to improve vision while their license is still valid. During every renewal cycle for drivers 21 years of age or older, cardholders have the option of choosing a driver's license valid for four or eight years.

Appointments for license renewals are encouraged to minimize wait times, although walk-ins will still be accommodated. No separate appointment is needed for the vision screening.

Vision screenings can be performed only once at a regional office during each renewal cycle.

Cole said the state is expected to hire 60 to 80 people to help with the screenings at the regional offices.

He also said the state will conduct a media campaign to inform state drivers about the new law. It will involve public advertising on radio and digital spots.

The state did not have ready figures on how much the additional personnel, screening boxes and the media campaign will cost.

Kentucky CDL (commercial driver's license) carriers with a valid, unexpired license are exempt from conducting a vision screening when renewing their license. Their annual required medical certification process includes the testing.

kentucky Lantern.com

Kentucky awards first medical cannabis dispensary licenses

By SARAH LADD
The Kentucky Lantern

LOUISVILLE—Kentucky awarded its first 36 medical cannabis dispensary licenses through a lottery held Monday at the Kentucky Lottery Corporation in Louisville.

These winners, from specific regions, are out of 4,075 who applied for dispensary licenses, according to Sam Flynn, executive director of the Kentucky Office of Medical Cannabis.

“This is another major step for ensuring Kentuckians suffering from cancer, PTSD and other serious conditions, have access to safe, affordable medical cannabis,” Gov. Andy Beshear said.

Dispensary winners

The Monday winners and their regions are:

- RTZ 20 LLC – Ashland, Boyd County

- Boarder Construction LLC – Ashland, Boyd County
- Southern Green Wellness LLC – Mt. Sterling, Montgomery County
- Bluegrass Blooms LLC – Ashland, Boyd County
- Zeus Agoraios LLC – Franklin, Simpson County
- AR-MO-KY-MS Cannabis Ventures LLC – Bowling Green, Warren County
- PROMO PULSE LLC – Bowling Green, Warren County
- FLOWER RADAR LLC – Bowling Green, Warren County
- REED KY DISPENSARY LLC – Somerset, Pulaski County
- ERH KY LLC – Somerset, Pulaski County
- JM Medicinals LLC – Russell Springs, Russell County
- No 1 Boundary LLC – Corbin, Whitley County
- BSRKYAPP LLC –

- Martin, Floyd County
- HYE Property Management LLC – Stanton, Powell County
- Kentuckyzen LLC – Pikeville, Pike County
- REED KY DISPENSARY LLC – Pikeville, Pike County
- Mallard Club LLC – Oak Grove, Christian County
- ARKY Capital Investments LLC – Eddyville, Lyon County
- River City Relief House LLC – Eddyville, Lyon County
- OM MED LLC – Paducah, McCracken County
- KY-CannCo LLC – Paducah, McCracken County
- Green4U LLC – Mayfield, Graves County
- Leiber Canna II LLC – Paducah, McCracken County

- Barrio Capital Partners LLC – Elizabethtown, Hardin County
- Thoroughtek LLC – Radcliff, Hardin County
- NGHKC – Eastview, Hardin County
- Wynn Win LLC – Elizabethtown, Hardin County
- YELLOW FLOWERS LLC – Erlanger, Kenton County
- Nicole Tirella – Alexandria, Campbell County
- Bluegrass Cannacare LLC – Florence, Boone County
- GREEN GRASS CANNABIS LLC – Erlanger, Kenton County
- OTC KY 3 LLC – Henderson, Henderson County
- Bungalow House LLC – Owensboro, Daviess County
- Tree Soft LLC – Henderson, Henderson County
- CP INVESTMENT LLC – Owensboro, Daviess County

Winners will get an email in the next 24 hours saying they were picked in the lottery, Flynn said, and detailing the regional area they were approved for. To get their licenses, those winners will need to pay a licensing fee within 15 days. If they don't, Flynn said, they forfeit the license.

Background and timeline of the program

In 2023, the legislature legalized medical marijuana for Kentuckians suffering from chronic illnesses.

Then, the bipartisan House Bill 829 that became law during this year's legislative session moved up the medical cannabis licensing timeline from January 2025 to July 1, 2024.

During the application period, July 1–Aug. 31, the state received 4,998 applications for medical cannabis business licens-

es, including 918 cultivator and processor applications.

Patients who qualify for medical cannabis — with a history of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), cancer or other approved medical conditions — will be able to start getting cards ready in December.

The state pulled its first 26 cultivators and processors lottery winners in October, all of whom have since been licensed, Beshear said.

Starting Dec. 1, the Office of Medical Cannabis will also have a directory so qualifying patients can search for a provider near them who can prescribe medical marijuana.

Another drawing will be held Dec. 16, where more dispensary license winners will be announced.

kentucky Lantern.com

LEADER-NEWS

Serving Muhlenberg County
Since 1912

1730 W. Everly Brothers Blvd. - P.O. Box 471
Central City, KY 42330
270-754-3000

Hours: Monday and Tuesday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Wednesday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

VISIT US ONLINE
www.ky-leadernews.com

EDITOR -
ADVERTISING - Amanda James
CIRCULATION - Lisa Sullivan
PLANT MANAGER - Bill Hinton

CORRECTIONS

We strive for accuracy.
To suggest a correction or clarification, email
editor@ky-leadernews.com

CONTACT THE NEWSROOM

to submit or suggest a news story or photo.
Email editor@ky-leadernews.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome letters to the editor. All letters must be signed with a phone number for verification, not publication. Letters are subject to editing for space. Letters containing profanity, knowingly inaccurate information or that are libelous in nature will not be published. The opinion of the writer does not reflect that of the Leader-News.

DEADLINES

Advertising, Legal Notices, Obituaries and Classifieds should be sent by 4 p.m. Mondays.

Published every Tuesday by the
Andy Anderson Corporation
Periodical Postage Paid at
Greenville, KY 42345
USPS 229-260

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
Leader-News, P.O. Box 138
Greenville, KY 42345

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

In Muhlenberg County - \$27.50 (tax included)
Elsewhere in Kentucky - \$29.70 (tax included)
Outside Kentucky - \$32
We accept MasterCard, Visa and Discover

MEMBER

