



Transportation and Driver Licenses

The co-sponsor group's transportation committee is responsible for arranging the refugees' transportation until the family is able to do this independently. When public transportation is available, a member of this team should introduce the refugee family to the system quickly and encourage them to use it. Both the transportation committee member responsible for bus orientation and the refugee family should maintain copies of public transportation schedules. Refugee family members will also benefit from tutorials on how to look up bus routes and other information pertaining to public transportation online.

It is best if the location of the refugee's housing and employment do not require long- term reliance on the cosponsoring group for their transportation needs. We have found that lack of public transportation causes feelings of frustration and isolation that hinder independence. Hence our strong recommendation that your refugee family be resettled in towns or cities near your group with adequate public transportation.

Some refugees will be interested in acquiring a car. Unless someone in the cosponsoring group is able to donate a used automobile, the refugee will need to work with the finance person to develop a plan for purchasing a car, maintaining it, and arranging for automobile insurance.

In most cases, the transportation committee will need to arrange for driving instruction and/or help the refugee prepare for his or her driver's license. **The Connecticut DMV now offers the learner's permit test in Albanian, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, English, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese as a part of their regular computerized testing system.** **In the summer of 2023, they also added paper and pencil permit test options in Amharic Ethiopia, Armenian, Bosnian, Chinese Simplified, Croatian, Dari, German, Greek, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Nepali, Pashto, Persian Farsi, Portuguese Brazil, Punjabi, Romanian, Somali, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian and Urdu.** In order to access the paper and pencil options, the test-taker should make an appointment online on the DMV's website in the normal fashion. When they arrive at the DMV branch for their appointment, they should request the language in which they would like to test. Those taking the test in this fashion should be warned that it will take longer than usual. If they pass, the DMV staff will need to upload the information into the computer system manually which takes more time.

In order to prepare for the permit test, test-takers should study the Connecticut Driver's Manual. IRIS has driver's manuals available in Arabic, Pashto and Dari as well as study questions that are translated in these languages. They are available on IRIS's [Co-Sponsors' Resources](#) website page under the DMV drop-down menu. These versions were translated by IRIS translators.

The DMV has also added a translation function to its website so its content can be automatically translated into many languages. This includes a page where they have the driver's manual embedded so it too can be automatically translated. Keep in mind these are electronic translations so will not be perfect. [HERE](#) is the page on the DMV website for the manual translations. Once navigating to this page, users need to click the button on the top right to choose a language.

After passing the permit test, the refugee family member can begin practicing for the Road Test with volunteers who have held a driver's license for at least four years.

The road test is administered in English. An interpreter may be present to explain the process before the exam begins, but may not be present during the actual test. Getting a driving license can be a trying ordeal, and many refugees do not pass it on their first or second attempt. It is worth investigating driving lessons at a local driving school in order to give refugees practice with following directions in English from someone they do not know. It is likely the group would need to subsidize such lessons.

It is important to emphasize that until the refugee holds a valid Connecticut driver's license, s/he is expected to work with the employment and transportation persons in your group to obtain employment. Thus it is imperative that these group members coordinate closely in surveying the feasibility of jobs in terms of English proficiency, skills, and geographical constraints.

Notes on IDLs and Legal Practices to Obtain US Driver's Licenses

In our experience, those refugees who know how to drive are understandably determined to get a US driver's license as soon as possible. Not only would this enable the refugees to work at jobs that require a US driver's license, it would allow them the kind of independent mobility they may have been accustomed to at home (i.e., especially in Iraq and Syria, where many people owned and drove cars).

In Connecticut, use of an international driver's license (IDL) for extended periods is only permitted if the driver is a visitor and is not intending to settle in the state. Refugees become residents of Connecticut as soon as they apply for benefits through the Department of Social Services (DSS). This means that once refugees become residents of the state, they may only drive legally with a valid Connecticut Driver's License. Thus use of IDLs by refugees is unlawful.

In addition, now that the driver's test is administered in many different languages including those that are most common among IRIS clients, there is no need for traveling to other states to undergo examination and road testing in their native languages (i.e., primarily New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Maine). **This is not legal, because they are legal residents of Connecticut and, in effect, would be lying about their residence in the other state.** While the practice is somewhat common among refugees in other parts of the country, it is nonetheless very risky. If during the course of their green card applications it is discovered that they were untruthful in obtaining a driver license outside their state of legal residence, they risk being disqualified.

IRIS worked very hard with the Connecticut DMV and state legislators to collaboratively and successfully bring a workable solution to a problem that put our clients at risk. Thus we ask you to work with your family to facilitate the DMV process in as practical a manner as possible, factoring in the ability to carry insurance and to afford all auto-related expenses themselves.

Driver's License Process Guidelines

1. Go to ct.gov/dmv
2. Click on "Licenses, permits & IDs" at the top of the page
3. Click on "Get a Driver's License"
4. Read through the steps outlined and the section "Requirements for naturalized and non-U.S. citizens"
5. Click on the highlighted [learner's permit](#) link in step 1.
6. Scroll to the Step-by-Step Guides and click on the appropriate link for teenage applicants or adults. **Note: adults who hold a driver's license from their country of origin can waive the 90**

day requirement for practice driving, but the test-taker must present the out-of-country license at their road test appointment.

7. Click on the “Get your learner’s permit” and follow the instructions. **Note: The documents acceptable for refugees depart from what is listed as required for non-citizens on the CT DMV’s [Document Checklist](#).** The combination of an I-94, EAD card and Social Security card are acceptable. The I-94 document categorizes refugees as having this status alerting the DMV staff to the documentation requirement shift. If the refugee arrives with a non-expired foreign passport this can also be used as a primary document along with the I-94 and SS card. This is helpful if the EAD card is delayed. For SIV’s, the visa in their passport (which serves as a temporary green card for a year after arrival) and a Social Security card should work. It is recommended that refugees bring any potentially pertinent documents with them for any DMV appointment, even if not listed (i.e. travel document or out-of-country IDs).
8. After passing the permit test, the applicant must complete an **8-Hour Safe Driving Course** before taking the road test. It can be taken through a licensed driving school. Many schools are offering online options and present them in languages other than English. Call schools directly to determine what languages they offer.

Other Tips to Help Clients Navigate the Licensing Process

Proof of Residency Requirements

Anyone applying for a State ID or a Learner’s Permit needs to present two forms of evidence of where they reside in CT. (A list can be found on the linked Document Checklist above).

TIP: Encourage clients to bring more than two pieces of mail or other documents from the list and to **check the addresses very carefully**. Many clients are turned away for seemingly insignificant differences found within the addresses on different pieces of mail. The addresses on each piece of mail (or on print outs of bank accounts, pay stubs etc.) should match EXACTLY.

TIP: New arrivals often do not have a lot of mail or mail arrives with their spouse’s name on it. Mail the client a letter or 2 or 5 ensuring the name on the envelope matches the name on the documents they will present, the addresses are exactly the same and they are mailed from several different sources. A marriage certificate can also be presented so mail would be acceptable proof even if it is in a spouse’s name, however, the certificate would need to be translated into English by a DMV approved translator found [HERE](#).

SAVE System

The SAVE system is run by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). It is an electronic immigration verification service. Before an applicant is allowed to take the Permit Test or is issued a state ID, if they are a non-citizen, their immigration information will be run through this system. Sometimes, an applicant is “red-flagged” and the DMV will not allow them to test or issue them ID. The DMV will request an email address and will email them once they have cleared. They can make a new appointment to return. Some clients have been flagged by this system due to a pending change in their status. This is not an indication that USCIS believes they are not qualified to be granted official government IDs. It is usually the case that the SAVE system has not caught up with the updates in other

USCIS systems. This can unfortunately create very inconvenient delays for the client. What we have been told to date is that the DMV has no control over the system and they must abide by it.

In addition to waiting for the email from the DMV, individuals flagged by the system can go to [SAVE CaseCheck | USCIS](#) and follow the directions. It will tell them what agency has requested the check and what their case status is. When it comes up as cleared, they should be able to make a new appointment and return to the DMV.

Illiterate Clients

The languages that are offered at the DMV that are uploaded to the computer system (as listed above) are also available in an audio version where the test-taker can wear a headset and listen to the questions and multiple choice answers read aloud. For those clients who need to try this in English because their native language is not available (not uploaded to the computer system), practicing in English with someone reading the questions aloud to them is possible, but more than likely will take a great deal of time and practice. The DMV does not allow live interpreters to assist during the actual test. They do have a language line available to assist at the counter when they check-in and need to present their documents. They are encouraged to ask for that assistance when needed.

Additional Questions

Call the DMV directly at 1.800.842.8222.