

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · KENTUCKY

How to Get a Driver License in Kentucky: 2026 Guide

Most Kentucky instructions you find online are out of date: licensing no longer happens at the courthouse clerk. And for a reader arriving from Türkiye, the outcome here is the opposite of what other states in this series produce.

SHORT ANSWER

Licensing belongs to the Division of Driver Licensing within the **Kentucky Transportation Cabinet**, and applications are taken at **regional licensing offices, not at the courthouse clerk**. The structure **splits three ways**: licensing at the transportation cabinet, **knowledge and road tests with the state police**, and **vehicle registration with the county clerk**. **If you came from another state your deadline is 30 days**. **If you came from Türkiye the path differs**: Türkiye is not on the reciprocity list, **but that does not lead to a mandatory driver education course**; it leads to the **full test set** (vision, knowledge and road test), starting from an instruction permit. **A non-citizen is issued a standard card only**, with a term tied to the expiration of your immigration documents. **And if your status changes you must apply to update the card within ten days**.

Three agencies, three separate doors

TRANSACTION	AGENCY
Driver license and ID card	The state transportation cabinet's regional licensing offices
Knowledge test and road test	The state police (Kentucky State Police)
Vehicle registration, plates and vehicle tax	The county clerk where you live

The split is the result of a reform: licensing used to sit with county courthouse clerks and was transferred to the transportation cabinet's own regional offices. The state police give the transfer date as **July 5, 2022**; the date **June 27, 2022** that appears in transportation cabinet documents could not be confirmed this round from the document's own stamp. **The practical consequence**: any Kentucky instruction online that says "go to the courthouse clerk for a license" is now wrong.

The office network and two conveniences

- There are **35 regional licensing offices** statewide and all are open weekdays **8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**
- **You do not have to go to your own county**. The state police say a driver test appointment can be booked at any regional office, regardless of their county; the transportation cabinet likewise says documents may be brought to any Driver Licensing Regional Office.

- **One of the five communities has no office at all**, and that is not a problem: residents there use a neighboring office in the same county. **Check your own community's guide for the office situation.**
- Each office has its own institutional email address, published in the office list.
- **The office list carries one piece of information you would not expect:** the agency puts a **time zone label** next to each office's hours, because **this state is split across two time zones**. When you confirm an appointment time, say plainly which clock you are speaking in.

Card type, term and fee

From the agency's own fee schedule. **The four-year and eight-year choice does not apply to non-citizens;** the reason is in the next section.

CARD	STANDARD FOUR-YEAR	STANDARD EIGHT-YEAR	FEDERALLY COMPLIANT FOUR-YEAR	FEDERALLY COMPLIANT EIGHT-YEAR
Driver license	\$21.50	\$43.00	\$24.00	\$48.00
Motorcycle license	\$21.50	\$43.00	\$24.00	\$48.00
Driver and motorcycle combined	\$26.50	\$53.00	\$29.00	\$58.00
ID card	\$11.50	\$23.00	\$14.00	\$28.00
Instruction permit	\$15.00 (three years)	not offered	\$18.00 (three years)	not offered

The agency also lists the payment methods: Payment types accepted: credit, debit, cash and check.

THE CARD ISSUED TO A NON-CITIZEN: FOUR RULES

- **The card issued is a standard card.** The statute says an applicant who is not a citizen or a lawful permanent resident may only be issued a standard operator's license or instruction permit. So **you cannot obtain the federally compliant card;** what you get is an ordinary driver license.
- **No status legend is printed on the card.** A bill in the 2026 session proposed adding one and **it did not become law.** No agency sentence saying a legend appears on the card was found either.
- **The term is tied to your status.** The agency's sentence: A license or ID card issued to a non-U.S. citizen will expire with their USCIS documents. The statute is more precise: validity runs to the expiration of your immigration document **or eight years, whichever is shorter**. If your document has no expiration date the card is valid for **one year**, and **the fee does not change**.
- **For asylees, refugees, humanitarian parolees and fiancé visa applicants** the agency defines a separate category and issues a **four-year** card.

TEN DAYS WHEN STATUS CHANGES: THE MOST MISSED RULE

- The statute's own sentence: If an applicant has any type of change in his or her immigration status, the applicant shall apply to update the operator's license ... within ten (10) days.
- **It applies even if you do not move.** An extension, a change of status or the approval of permanent residence all trigger it.
- **The place of application is not the one you expect:** the statute directs it to the **state headquarters in Frankfort or a field office, not the county circuit court clerk.**
- **The day your green card arrives, put the licensing office on your list;** this is one of the most frequently skipped items in the series.

Where your information goes

The agency's own step list reads: Visit a Driver Licensing Regional office: Bring all required documents. Complete the SAVE Verification process at the office. The statute says the same thing twice: the cabinet verifies application information through the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements program, and confirms the applicant's immigration status and personal identity through federal government systems and databases.

The practical consequence: the information on your documents and the federal records must **match exactly**. A difference in how a name is spelled, a document that recently expired, or a status change not yet entered in the system can stop the transaction at the counter. The agency also attaches this warning to its own status list: These statuses are subject to review and change as the Division of Driver Licensing continues strengthening review procedures within the issuance process for non-U.S. citizens. **So the rules are in motion;** open the agency's own page before you go.

Which documents are required

- Proof of lawful presence in the United States.
- **Social Security card.**
- **Proof of Kentucky residency no more than one year old.** If you want the federally compliant card the agency asks for **two**.
- Your previous state's license; if you do not have it, a certified driving record or clearance letter from that state **dated within the last 30 days**.
- Any name or gender change document; for applicants under 18, a school compliance form.
- **Copies are not accepted:** All documentation must be in the original form and is subject to approval.
- **Turkish documents require a notarized translation.** The agency's sentence: Foreign licenses, birth certificates, and marriage licenses must include a notarized, translated statement.
- **Permanent residents bring the card to every transaction:** Permanent Residents and Resident Aliens must present their current and updated Permanent Resident Card or I-551 with photo for all transactions, including renewals and updates.

There is one convenience for people waiting on an extension: the agency can accept the digital receipt notice for an extension application, but the document must be brought **in printed form**, because the office

scans it into the record. **On renewals the rule is plain:** a non-citizen renews in person at any Driver Licensing Regional office, every renewal includes a vision screening, and **all documents are requested again.** **Whether online renewal is open to non-citizens could not be confirmed;** we do not say there is none, we say it was not found.

What happens with a Turkish license

The agency's own parenthetical limits the reciprocity list to two countries: Holds a valid license from a reciprocity country (Taiwan & South Korea). **Türkiye is not on that list. But that does not lead to a mandatory driver education course,** and we flag the distinction deliberately: in some other states, being off the list means completing an approved course, while **in Kentucky no mandatory course for adult applicants was found.** Mandatory driver education here is an **age rule:** the state police write Drivers whose permits were issued under the age of 18 are required to complete a driver education program.

THE APPLICANT'S SITUATION	WHAT THE AGENCY REQUIRES
Foreign license, has permanent residence, country on the agency's accepted list	Vision screening and knowledge test
Foreign license, has permanent residence, country not on the list	Vision, knowledge and road test. The agency's note: Applicant must start with a driver's permit
Foreign license, neither citizen nor permanent resident, country on the list	Vision, knowledge and road test
Foreign license, neither citizen nor permanent resident, country not on the list	Knowledge, vision and road test, again starting from an instruction permit
A valid license from another U.S. state	No tests
A license from another U.S. state expired less than a year	No tests

We state one gap plainly: the agency uses the phrase U.S. accepted foreign country license but **does not publish that list.** So **which row a Turkish license falls into is unclear.** The practical result: **there is a road test either way,** because an applicant without permanent residence takes the road test in both rows. If you do hold permanent residence, **ask about your row at the office.**

THE ONE-YEAR DRIVING RIGHT: THE SAME PAGE STATES TWO DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

- **The explanation at the top of the page:** one year from entry on a valid foreign license and an international driving permit, if their home country is party to the Geneva Convention.
- **The frequently asked questions on the same page:** one year from entry, if your home country is part of the reciprocity list.
- **These are not the same thing, and for Türkiye they point in opposite directions:** Türkiye is a party to the 1949 Geneva Convention on Road Traffic, **but it is not on this state's two-country reciprocity list.**
- **We take no side.** Practical advice: do not lean on the ambiguity and wait. **Start the Kentucky license process from the day you arrive,** and obtain your international driving permit **before you leave Türkiye.**

Test language: no Turkish

The state police list the languages the knowledge test is offered in, one by one: Arabic, Burmese (Myanmar), Chinese, Dari (Afghan Persian), English, French, Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), Japanese, Pashto, Somali, Spanish, Swahili. **Twelve languages, and Turkish is not among them.** The driver manual is translated into Spanish only. **Three accommodations were measured:**

- **Some offices offer an audio test**, and where it is unavailable the test may be given **orally**: The test may be administered orally at locations where this service is not available.
- **There is a separate official form for interpreters**: the transportation cabinet lists a form called Interpreter Affidavit of a Foreign Country Driver License among its own resources.
- For deaf and hard of hearing applicants: Contact your testing site to make an appointment and request a sign language interpreter.
- **But one limit should be stated**: no clear agency sentence was found on whether an interpreter may be used **during the knowledge test**. Call the office before you book and write down the answer.

The commercial license list has narrowed. The agency says federal rules changed and lists the non-citizen categories that may be issued a commercial credential. **The single line that directly concerns Turkish readers: the treaty investor visa is on that list.** Seasonal agricultural and non-agricultural work visas and certain island nations are also named. **Work visas, student visas and intracompany transfer visas are not on the list.**

- 1 Talk to your attorney first.** Which card you receive on which document depends on your status, and any decision touching status can affect your immigration case.
- 2 Get notarized translations done in your first week:** the agency requires them for a Turkish license, a birth certificate and a marriage certificate.
- 3 Settle your Social Security situation;** the agency looks for the number, or for a document showing you are not eligible for one, in the license file.
- 4 Go to the office for an instruction permit.** If you are taking a road test you are required to start from that permit anyway.
- 5 Book at any regional office** and confirm which time zone that office sits in.
- 6 Bring every document in original form;** copies are not accepted.
- 7 If your status changes, update the card within ten days** and file at the state headquarters or a field office.
- 8 For offices and local detail by city, see our [Louisville](#), [Lexington](#), [Jeffersontown](#), [Bowling Green](#) and [Elizabethtown](#) guides.**



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