

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · MICHIGAN

How to Get a Driver's License in Michigan: The Treaty-Country Rule and 2026 Guide

Türkiye is on the state's treaty-country list, but that is a visitor rule. The adult route, a test in thirty-two languages, your interpreter right and the fees.

SHORT ANSWER

The most valuable fact in this guide has three parts, and they are never separated. First: **Türkiye is on Michigan's published list of treaty countries**, so a Turkish license holder may legally drive here on that license if it is printed in English or carries an English translation, and the state says **no proof of legal presence is needed** for the license itself. Second: **this is a visitor rule**. The state's own document says only people who intend to become Michigan residents and live here permanently should apply for a Michigan license. Third: **an International Driving Permit is not a license**, only the English translation of one, and the United States does not issue it. You get it in Türkiye.

Three parts, and why none of them should be read alone

- **Part one: Türkiye is on the treaty-country list.** Two Michigan Secretary of State documents written for police carry the same sentence: drivers from treaty countries are allowed to legally drive in Michigan on a foreign driver's license if the license is printed in English or accompanied with an English translation, and under Michigan law **the driver does not need to show proof of legal presence**. Türkiye appears on that list, between Tunisia and Uganda. Both documents are here: the [treaty-country palm card](#) and the [law enforcement tip sheet](#). To see what the rule is worth, look at the other box: drivers from **non-treaty** countries may also drive on a foreign license, but only if it meets the English condition **and the driver can show proof of legal presence**. So of two drivers stopped on the same road, one is asked for status paperwork and the other is not, and the Turkish driver is on the side that is not asked.
- **Part two: this is a visitor rule.** The same document says: foreign drivers who are visiting do not need a Michigan driver's license; only those who intend to **become a Michigan resident and live in the state permanently** should apply for one. Note that Michigan gives **no day count** here; the trigger is not a calendar but becoming a resident. The research found no SOS page stating a day count for license transfer, so we do not say there is none, we say **none was found**. In practice the things that make you a resident are obvious: a lease, a job, a child enrolled in school, a car registered here. Michigan also does **not exchange** a Turkish license for a Michigan one: the SOS conversion track names only a valid license issued by another US state, a US territory or Canada.
- **Part three: an International Driving Permit is not a license.** SOS corrects this word for word in its tip sheet: the International Driving Permit, sometimes called an International Driver's License, is the **written English translation** of a foreign license, and **it cannot be used as a driver's license**. The second sentence

changes your travel planning: **the United States does not issue International Driving Permits to foreign visitors**; the permit comes from the motor vehicle department of the country that issued the license, which in Türkiye is handled through the Turkish Touring and Automobile Association. **So get it before you leave Türkiye**, because there is no way to obtain it here.

ALL THREE, IN ONE SENTENCE

You may legally drive in Michigan as a visitor on your Turkish license; if the license is not in English you must carry an International Driving Permit obtained in Türkiye; and as soon as you settle in Michigan you need a Michigan license. Any guide that drops one of those three sentences will mislead you. And do not confuse one thing: not being asked for proof of legal presence is **a licensing rule**, not a shield in immigration enforcement. The fact that your license stays valid at a traffic stop without status paperwork gives you no exemption in any other setting. SOS Information Center: **888-767-6424** (888-SOS-MICH).

Once you are a Michigan resident: the adult license route

- 1 Pass the knowledge test**, either at an SOS office or online from home. A Michigan license comes from the **Secretary of State**, and **Michigan has no county motor vehicle office**: licensing and vehicle registration run entirely through state branch offices. This guide will never send you to a county office.
- 2 Get a Temporary Instruction Permit (TIP)**, in person at an SOS office.
- 3 Practice for at least 30 days** with a licensed adult.
- 4 Take the on-road skills test, but the state does not run it.** On [its own page](#) SOS says independent driver testing businesses run the road test and that **the fees those businesses charge are not regulated by the department**. Before you book, ask about the initial and retest fee, the refund policy, charges for improper documents or defective equipment, and no-show charges.
- 5 The card arrives by mail.** The testing business reports the result electronically; meanwhile you can log into e-Services for a Temporary Operator License. If results have not posted within 24 hours, take the skills test certificate, the permit and your ID to an SOS office.

Three clocks run and all three catch people out. The **TIP is valid 180 days**: if you do not pass the skills test inside that window, the whole process starts again. A **passed knowledge test is valid one year**, but if the permit expires and you need a new one, you retake the knowledge test. And **every new driver is on probation for three years**, whatever their age: an at-fault or had-been-drinking crash, a suspension or a traffic conviction in the last 10 months restarts that 10-month clock. One piece of good news: **driver education is not required for adults**. SOS states that driver education classes are not required for Michigan residents aged 18 and older.

Your car is inspected before the road test

Before the examiner drives with you, the vehicle is checked. SOS says the examiner looks for a valid certificate of **Michigan No-Fault insurance**, the vehicle registration, and **a license plate with the correct year's tab**. A broken taillight or a missing mirror cancels the test. **Driver-activated features are banned during the test**: self-parking, four-way camera, self-driving. Failing any one of the three components

(vehicle inspection, basic control, on-road driving) ends the test, and **only one skills test is allowed in 24 hours**.

Documents a new resident brings, and what a temporary status means

- **Four classes of document.** For a first Michigan license or ID card, SOS asks a new resident for proof of **legal presence**, proof of a **Social Security number**, proof of **identity**, and **two documents proving Michigan residency**. If you are converting a license from another US state, a US territory or Canada, add that valid license. You pre-apply online and then book an office visit.
 - **Acceptable residency documents** include a utility or credit card bill issued within the last 90 days (electronic copies accepted), a bank statement from the last 90 days, a Michigan school, college or university report card or transcript, a mortgage, lease or rental agreement, a pay stub showing your name and address, or a Michigan title and registration. We took this list from the SOS frequently-asked-questions page but could not re-read that page line by line, so confirm before your appointment.
 - **A first license, a first ID card and a REAL ID conversion are done in person**, not online. SOS offices take cash, check, money order (payable to State of Michigan), Amex, Discover, MasterCard and Visa debit or credit, Apple Pay, Google Pay and Samsung Pay; **a service fee applies to card payment**, and we could not verify the amount.
 - **If your status is temporary, so is your card.** SOS puts it plainly: residents with temporary legal presence in the United States are issued a **limited-term** driver's license, valid only for as long as they are authorized to remain in the country. Anyone here on H-1B, L-1, F-1 or J-1 is in this category; keep the extension calendar and the license calendar together.
 - **Ask how your name will print.** SOS has a published rule: the first and middle name print on line one and the surname on line two, the system allows **36 characters** in the full name fields and shortens longer names automatically, **apostrophes cannot be printed** and hyphens can. How Michigan renders Turkish letters was not established in the research, and that matters: the spelling on your license has to match the spelling on your bank, employment and immigration documents. Compare when the card arrives.
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The knowledge test comes in thirty-two languages, and Turkish is not one of them

We write this exactly as it is. On its [language services page](#) SOS says every Secretary of State office offers the driver knowledge exam in Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Bangla, Burmese, Chaldean, Karen, Kibembe, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Lao, Malay, Punjabi, Urdu, Romanian and Swahili. **Turkish is not on that list.** Chauffeur, moped, motorcycle and recreational endorsement tests come only in English, Spanish and Arabic. The 164 self-service stations are narrower (Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Mandarin, Pashto, Spanish, Swahili and Vietnamese) and charge a **\$4.25 service fee per item** transacted. The driver manual is *What Every Driver Must Know*, and chapters 4 to 7 are the recommended study.

WHAT THE STATE PUBLISHES INSTEAD IS AN INTERPRETER ROUTE, AND IT IS FREE TO YOU

- **Approved interpreters.** On the same page SOS writes that for any language not listed, information about approved interpreters is available on **888-767-6424**, at MDOS-Access@Michigan.gov, or at a Secretary of State office. And the critical sentence: **approved interpreters are prohibited from charging a fee.**
- **A one-time volunteer interpreter.** A person you choose may interpret for a test, a hearing or a reexamination provided the department authorizes them **before** the visit. They complete and sign the *Application to Provide Volunteer Interpreter Services*, select the one-time option, and attach a photo or photocopy of their valid unexpired license or ID. Send it to Michigan Department of State, Enforcement Division, P.O. Box 30708, Lansing, MI 48909; fax 517-335-3241; email SOS-OIS@Michigan.gov.
- **An interpreter may sit in the car during the road test.** SOS states that if required, a sign language interpreter or a foreign language interpreter may be present in the vehicle to translate the examiner's instructions. For non-testing services at a branch, over-the-phone and device-assisted interpretation can be requested **with no advance notice.**
- **Start this weeks before your appointment,** because the authorization travels by post. On the day, carry the interpreter's authorization with you.

The at-home test, REAL ID and the Enhanced license

- **Anyone 18 or older may take the knowledge test online,** and SOS says the online test is identical to the one given in its offices. The technical conditions are strict: a computer or laptop with a keyboard and mouse (**no touch screens**), a **webcam** that takes random photographs during the test, an "Operator" section of about 45 minutes and a "Signs" segment of about 15 minutes, with the result by email. A third-party vendor runs it; support is on 833-939-2364, and after passing you still need an SOS appointment to collect the permit.
- **The money runs the other way:** the online test costs **\$6.50** in convenience and card processing fees, while taking it at an SOS office is **free** with an appointment. If your driving privileges are suspended, revoked or denied, the \$6.50 is still charged, is not refunded, and no license is issued. **We could not confirm whether the online version offers the same 32 languages:** SOS calls it identical and says it is available in English and a number of foreign languages, without repeating the list.
- **REAL ID here is the default rather than an extra step.** SOS states that applicants who meet all the requirements will be issued a REAL ID compliant license **unless they have asked to opt out.** SOS also gives the enforcement date in its own words: **as of May 7, 2025**, Michigan residents need a REAL ID compliant document to fly within the United States and to enter certain federal facilities. That is current law, not a pending date.
- **A careful note on the Enhanced license.** An EDL costs \$45 and is accepted by US border officers as an entry document when returning by **land or sea** from Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean; it also meets REAL ID. A US passport is still needed for international air travel. **The research could not confirm whether a person who is not a US citizen may hold one:** the EDL is designed as a document that proves citizenship, which in other states restricts it to citizens, but no SOS sentence saying so was read. Call 888-767-6424 and ask about your own status before applying.
- **An in-person renewal with a new photo and a vision test is required every 12 years.**

Fees

ITEM	FEE
Standard driver's license	\$25
Enhanced driver's license (EDL)	\$45
Knowledge test at an SOS office	Free, by appointment
Knowledge test online from home	\$6.50, not refundable
Self-service station, per item	\$4.25
Road skills test	Set by the private testing business; not regulated by the state
Approved interpreter	Prohibited from charging a fee

Some fees are missing here and we would rather say so: the state ID card fee, the license renewal fee, the duplicate license fee, the limited-term license fee and the amount of the card payment service fee could not be verified in the research. We leave them blank instead of guessing; confirm the figure with SOS before you transact. **The same discipline applies to addresses: this guide prints no Michigan Secretary of State branch address and no opening hours**, because during the research the SOS office locator, the office hours page and the official office list could not be read by any route. Find your nearest branch and its hours on the SOS site or on **888-767-6424**. You can also find a driver testing business by county through the SOS "Locate a driver testing business" search.

THE SHARPEST WARNING: APPLYING FOR A LICENSE REGISTERS YOU TO VOTE

- SOS states that by state law, when an eligible person applies for a Michigan license or ID they are **automatically registered to vote** and are sent instructions by mail on how to opt out.
- Michigan's voter eligibility rules require **US citizenship**. So for a reader who is not a citizen, the critical moment is not the ballot box but **the licensing counter**.
- **Be alert at the counter:** when you are asked about citizenship or a voter registration box comes in front of you, say plainly that you are not a citizen and do not sign that section.
- **Do not throw away the notice that arrives in the post.** The opt-out instructions come by mail; if you mistook the letter for advertising, you may stay registered without knowing it.
- A non-citizen knowingly claiming to be a US citizen is a **federal crime**, and the immigration consequences are usually heavier than the criminal ones. The fact that nobody checked your documents at the counter does not protect you; the mechanism is the claim itself.
- If you think a registration was made in error, speak to an immigration attorney before you answer a citizenship question on any official form.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN MICHIGAN

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