

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · NORTH CAROLINA

How to Get a Driver's License in North Carolina: 2026 Guide

The strictest state in this series on immigration status. Documents, the 60-day clock, the expired-license moratorium, REAL ID, interpreters and fees.

SHORT ANSWER

Of the states in this series, **North Carolina is the strictest on immigration status**. The NCDMV first-license page offers an applicant who is not a U.S. citizen exactly one route: **one U.S. government document showing legal presence**. There is no visitor license, no driving privilege card and no affidavit, and nothing was abolished here either: the state has never had such a credential in the modern era. On top of that, the same page requires a **Social Security number** without qualification, and **we could not find an official page** describing what a lawfully present applicant with no SSN should bring. If you have just moved, the clock is **60 days**.

What to know before you start

- **Legal presence is required.** A non-citizen applicant must bring one document issued by the U.S. government: a green card (I-551), an employment authorization document (I-766 or I-688B), a valid foreign passport with a valid U.S. visa plus the I-94 arrival record, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240, DS-1350, FS-545), a Certificate of Naturalization (N-550/N-570) or a Certificate of Citizenship (N-560/N-561).
- **A Social Security number is required without qualification.** The page asks for a Social Security card or one document proving you have a number, states it flatly and offers no alternative route. Accepted: the card itself (no photocopies), a 1099, a W-2 or a payroll record, each showing the full number and the name. **We could not find a published route for a lawfully present applicant who has no number.** That is not a stated bar; it is a gap on the official pages.
- **Sixty days.** You must hold a North Carolina license within 60 days of becoming a resident, and your previous state license stops being valid at that point. NCDMV asks that it be properly destroyed or surrendered to the Driver License Section in Raleigh.
- **A temporary status means a temporary license.** On F-1, J-1, H-1B, L-1 or E-2 your license expires with your document, so every extension means a fresh USCIS document and another office visit. Someone with permanent or indefinite status, such as a green card holder, has received a normal full-term license since a 2023 practice change; we could not reach the NCDOT decision describing that change, but two separate state sources agree on its substance and date.
- **There are four tests.** A first-time applicant takes a knowledge test, a **separate road-sign recognition test**, a vision test and a road test. The waiver applies only to someone holding a valid license from another U.S. state; it is written in terms of another state, not another country.

- **We could not confirm whether the exam is offered in Turkish.** The NCDMV interpreter page says it provides interpreters to customers who do not speak English, but **no language is named on that page** and there is no published list of exam languages. What we did confirm will serve you: **a free interpreter can be requested in advance**, through the online form or by calling the NCDMV call center on **(919) 715-7000**, weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Whether you may bring your own interpreter, and whether the exam can be given orally, the page does not say.
- **No appointment is required.** NCDMV says each office takes walk-ins all day or until that office reaches capacity.

AN EXPIRED LICENSE: YOU MAY DRIVE ON IT, BUT YOU CANNOT START A JOB WITH IT

This is the most important detail in this guide. **A Class C license that expired on or after July 1, 2025 remains valid for driving for two years past the printed date, through December 31, 2027.** But NCDMV says plainly in the same announcement that the expired card is **not valid as identification and not valid for air travel**, and may not be recognized by other states or federal bodies. On top of that, the federal guidance the research located says an **expired North Carolina license is not acceptable for Form I-9**, the employment eligibility form. We could not read the body of that federal page, because uscis.gov refused both of our tools, but the page exists and its title is unambiguous. In practice: you may drive on that card inside the state, but **you cannot start a job with it**, you cannot board a plane and you cannot use it as identification. For an immigrant reader the moratorium is not a convenience, it is a trap. If your date has passed, do not wait, renew.

How to apply, step by step

- 1 **Match your documents against the list.** One age and identity document, one Social Security document, one legal presence document, residency documents (one for citizens, two for a REAL ID) and a printed liability insurance document. Insurance is not required for a learner permit.
- 2 **If something is missing, call first.** With no SSN, call **(919) 715-7000** before you go, describe your situation, and note the answer with the date and the representative's name. Build the sequence backwards: settle the documents first, then start studying.
- 3 **Arrange the interpreter in advance.** The request form asks for your name, contact details, identification number, county, which office you will visit and which transaction you need, so it is tied to a specific visit and does not happen same-day.
- 4 **Study the driver handbook.** The separate sign-recognition test alongside the knowledge test is not a separate item in most states, and it catches unprepared applicants out.
- 5 **Learner permit or a direct application.** Adults 18 and over may apply directly. The learner permit is \$25.50.
- 6 **Bring a registered and insured car to the road test.** The insurance must come from a company licensed to do business in **North Carolina**; out-of-state policies are not accepted.

Which documents are asked for?

WHAT IS ASKED FOR	WHAT WORKS FOR SOMEONE ARRIVING FROM TÜRKIYE
Age and identity	One document verifying your age and identity
Social Security	The card itself (no photocopies), a 1099, a W-2 or a payroll record, each showing the full number and the name. No alternative route is published
Legal presence (non-citizens)	I-551 green card, I-766 or I-688B employment authorization document, a valid foreign passport with a valid U.S. visa plus the I-94, FS-240 / DS-1350 / FS-545, N-550 / N-570, N-560 / N-561
Residency	A state vehicle registration, insurance policy or title, a voter precinct card, a utility or cable bill, a mortgage statement or lease, military documents, school records and a letter from a homeless shelter . Two documents for a REAL ID
Liability insurance	One printed document from a company licensed to do business in the state. Not required for a learner permit

Fees (2026)

ITEM	FEE
Class C driver license	\$6.50 per year, about \$52 for a standard 8-year license
Learner permit	\$25.50
Duplicate license	\$12.75
REAL ID surcharge	None, the cost is the same as a standard license
Online transaction fee (PayIt)	\$3.00 per transaction plus a 1.85% card fee

The license fees come from NCDMV's 2024 quadrennial adjustment release, whose table columns shifted when we read it, so **treat these lines as unconfirmed** and check at the office. A license is valid 8 years for ages 18 to 65 and 5 years from 66; we took that term from the state domain's search index because the fee page's accordion needs JavaScript. State law requires about 90 license and registration fees to be adjusted for inflation every four years; the last adjustment was 19.18% on July 1, 2024, so the next is due July 1, 2028.

Arriving with a Turkish license

- **No exchange.** We could not find any North Carolina reciprocity or exchange arrangement with Türkiye or with any other country. This is a negative finding: we could not positively confirm on an agency page that no such arrangement exists, only that we could not find one.
- **You sit the full set of tests.** The only difference is that you skip the graduated licensing steps that apply to 15 to 17 year olds.
- **The first 60 days.** A Turkish license plus an International Driving Permit covers only those first 60 days. An IDP is not a license on its own, it is a translation of an existing one, so your Turkish license must still be in date for it to be of any use.

- **Keep your Turkish license.** The surrender duty is written for U.S. state licenses. It can still help with business in Türkiye and with car rental.

REAL ID

A North Carolina REAL ID is a license or identification card with a **star** in the top right corner. Federal enforcement **began on May 7, 2025**: since that day a REAL ID, a U.S. passport or another federally accepted identification is needed to board a domestic flight or enter a secured federal building. The standard license without a star is still issued and is marked **Not for Federal Purposes**. **There is no REAL ID surcharge**; the only extra burden is finding the second residency document. The NCDMV page does not say whether a non-citizen may hold a REAL ID, but because the legal status documents it accepts are exactly the federal REAL ID list, we conclude that a lawfully present foreign national can get one. That is our inference, not a statement on the page.

Offices and contacts

ITEM	DETAIL
Raleigh East	4121 New Bern Ave. · address confirmed
Raleigh West	3231 Avent Ferry Rd. · address confirmed
Raleigh North	Such an office exists but we could not confirm its address
Where to surrender an out-of-state license	Driver License Section, 3101 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-3101
The agency's physical operations address	1515 N. Church St., Rocky Mount
Call center	(919) 715-7000 · weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. · interpreter requests go here too
Saturday service	In summer about 20 offices take walk-ins on Saturdays 8 a.m. to noon, and the list is republished each year; we could not confirm the 2026 list

Official pages: [new residents and the 60-day rule](#) · [first-time applicants](#) · [driver tests](#)

Common mistakes

- Assuming the exam is offered in Turkish and preparing accordingly; no language list is published, so arrange the interpreter in advance.
- Studying only for the knowledge test and skipping the separate sign-recognition test.
- Taking the road test in a car covered by an out-of-state policy; the insurer must be licensed in the state.
- Counting the 60 days from the day you find work rather than the day you move. The car deadline is shorter still.
- Applying for a job or trying to board a plane on an expired card; the moratorium covers driving only.
- Bringing a photocopy of the Social Security card; the original is required.

THE SSN GAP: WHAT IS SAID, AND WHAT IS NOT

If you have no number and you are lawfully present, know what the official pages **do not** say rather than what they do. NCDMV publishes no alternative route; that is a gap, not a statement of prohibition. The back of the card is reported to carry the legal presence expiry date, but **we could not find any NCDMV page describing the back of the card**, so we do not quote the wording. Be ready to explain to an officer or an employer holding your card what that line is.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN NORTH CAROLINA

Have a question about your immigration status?

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