

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · SOUTH CAROLINA

How to Get a Driver License in South Carolina: 2026 Guide

Lawful status and a Social Security number are required, but a person on temporary status still gets a full REAL ID and pays no surcharge. The traps are the branch and the number of documents you bring.

SHORT ANSWER

South Carolina requires **lawful status and a Social Security number** for a license, but in return it gives something rare in this series: **a person on temporary status also receives a full REAL ID**. The card carries a star and the words "**LIMITED TERM**", and in the agency's own sentence it **can be used to board a plane and to enter secure federal buildings**, with **no surcharge at all**; whichever option you choose, the price is the same as a non-REAL ID card. There are two traps. The first is the branch: of roughly **69 branches only 30** serve non-citizens, and **the Mount Pleasant branch is not one of them**. The second is the card itself: **which card you get is decided by how many address documents you bring**, and a reader who shows up with one document quietly selects the lesser card.

The threshold question: lawful status and a number

The agency's own vocabulary says it. There is a separate page for non-citizens, a separate checklist (form **MV-94**) and a separate set of branches, and the page is titled "**lawfully present non-US Citizens**." Its sentence reads: if you are not a U.S. citizen you may apply for a South Carolina license or ID card **only at certain branches**.

- **The Social Security number is mandatory.** Step C of MV-94 requires you to provide your number and the number is **verified electronically** against the Social Security Administration's record; if you have no number you bring the administration's **letter stating that none was issued**. The name, date of birth and number on the form must match the agency record exactly.
- **The commercial license is closed.** The agency's sentence: a commercial driver license and commercial learner permit are issued **only to U.S. citizens and permanent resident card holders**. For a driver on temporary status that door never opens.
- **Original documents are required**, not photocopies, and the agency writes that the list may change at its own discretion.
- **One administrative note:** in early 2026 the agency moved its web and email presence to the `dmv.sc.gov` domain. The `scdmvonline.com` links in older guides no longer work. MV-94 is currently at revision **06/2026**; save the agency's own page rather than the PDF.

Thirty branches, and the flagship town's branch is not among them

The agency puts the number of branches that issue licenses and ID cards to non-citizens at **30**, and tells you to narrow the branch locator with its **international customers** filter. For a reader living in Mount Pleasant we state the result as it is: **the Mount Pleasant branch's own page says "International Customers: No."** So if you are not a citizen you cross the Cooper River to one of these three branches.

BRANCH THAT SERVES NON-CITIZENS	ADDRESS
Leeds Avenue branch	3790 Leeds Ave, North Charleston, SC 29405
Orleans Road branch	946 Orleans Road, Charleston, SC 29407
Ladson branch	135 Wimberly Drive, Ladson, SC 29456

We do not print phone numbers here, and the reason is concrete: **the address and phone block on form MV-94 contains plain errors.** One ZIP code reads 20201 instead of 29201, one branch number begins with another state's area code, two numbers are not even valid U.S. numbers, and two place names are misspelled. The agency's own branch locator carries the correct information: dmv.sc.gov/locations. Take the number from there, not from the form. Statewide, the thirty branches that serve non-citizens are: Beaufort, Bennettsville, Bishopville, Bluffton, Charleston-Leeds, Charleston-Orleans, Chester, Columbia-Shop Road, Conway, Dillon, Florence, Gaffney, Greenville-Saluda Dam, Greenwood, Greer, Irmo-Ballentine, Kingstree, Ladson, Lancaster, Laurens, Marion, Myrtle Beach, Myrtle Beach Commons, North Augusta, North Myrtle Beach, Orangeburg, Rock Hill, Seneca, Spartanburg-Southport and Sumter.

THE REAL ID IS CHOSEN BY DOCUMENT COUNT, AND TEMPORARY STATUS STILL BOARDS A PLANE

- In the agency's own words: a REAL ID card will carry **a star and the words "LIMITED TERM" printed on the front**, and that card **may be used to board a plane or enter secure federal facilities**. The fee question closes in the same sentence: **whichever option you choose, a South Carolina REAL ID costs the same as a non-REAL ID license, permit or ID card**. There is no surcharge.
- **What selects the card is the document count**: bring **two** proofs of South Carolina address from two different sources showing the same address and you get the star-marked REAL ID; bring **one** and you get a card with **"NOT FOR FEDERAL IDENTIFICATION"** printed on the front. **The trap is silent**, and the reader discovers it six months later at an airport.
- The lesser card is still a full license: you do not need a REAL ID to drive, access hospital care, enter non-secure federal buildings such as a post office, receive federal benefits you qualify for, or participate in law enforcement proceedings. The only thing missing is the airport and the secure federal facility.
- **Validity**: the agency issues no license to a non-citizen for **less than one year or more than eight years**. If you have **changed status inside the United States, have a pending change of status, or have requested an extension of stay**, a one-year extension is available; you bring the originals of all your entry documents, even expired ones, plus the immigration document authorizing your presence in that status.
- **An expired visa ends REAL ID eligibility**. The agency's sentence: if your visa is expired you are not eligible for a REAL ID even if you hold an I-797. I-797 documents are accepted only at the agency's discretion, and **an I-797 expired for more than 12 months is not accepted at all**.
- **A license card does not confer the right to vote**. When MV-94 lists what you can do without a REAL ID it includes voting; **that sentence is written for citizens**. No license or ID card of any kind confers voting rights, and registering to vote while not a citizen seriously affects your immigration file.

Accepted proofs of address

The list in the first section of MV-94 is broad for a newcomer. First the strict rule: documents **may not be more than 9 months old from the date of issue** and must show a physical address, not a post office box. The list: a South Carolina license, permit, ID card or **vehicle registration**; a **county tax statement or a paid property tax receipt for your vehicle or home**; state or federal tax records, including a W-2 or form 1095-B, as the primary taxpayer or a dependent; South Carolina school records (report card, transcript, letter on school or district letterhead, school fee statement, student loan receipt); a **current lease for an apartment, house or vehicle**; a **bill, payment receipt or approved utility application** mailed to your current South Carolina address (water, sewer, gas, electric, cable or satellite television, internet, cell phone or landline; a bill sent to an out-of-state address is not accepted); a bank or credit card statement, or a signed letter on bank letterhead; a mortgage statement or deed; an **insurance document** from a company licensed in South Carolina (renter insurance only together with another document; **plastic cards are not accepted**); a **current hire letter or pay stub**; a postal change of address confirmation or postmarked mail; a state hunting and fishing license, boat registration or concealed carry permit; and other documents issued by a federal, state or municipal body.

The extra document required per visa type

MV-94 asks for a status-specific document **on top of** everything above. The form's general rule: if your visa permits you to work or study in the United States, you bring a written confirmation **on your employer's or school's letterhead** showing that you are still employed or enrolled in good standing, and **the letter must be signed by an authorized person**.

STATUS	EXTRA DOCUMENT REQUIRED
B1 or B2	A valid and paid South Carolina real property tax receipt (residential only)
E1, E2, H1, H2, L1, L2	A hire letter , no more than one year old
F1 or F2	Form I-20
J1 or J2	Form DS-2019 or IAP-66
K1 or K2	A marriage license or certificate plus form I-797 notice showing you applied for permanent status
Permanent resident card holder	An unexpired I-551, or a valid passport stamped "I-551 approved" or "processed for I-551"; also proof of place of birth if the card does not show it. For ages 14 and up a fingerprint must be visible on the card. Renewal and duplicate are done in person at a designated branch
Refugee	An I-94 stamped "Refugee", or an unexpired I-766 employment authorization card
Asylee	An unexpired I-766, or all of the following: an I-94 stamped "Asylee", an unexpired passport, and the Social Security Administration's denial letter if you have no number
Other non-immigrants granted temporary admission	An unexpired I-766, or both an unexpired passport with visa and an I-94

Documents in Turkish: form 4030

This rule touches every document a Turkish reader holds, because neither a Turkish license nor a Turkish birth certificate is in English. MV-94's sentence: **documents not in English must be translated by a qualified or certified translator on a Certificate of Translation (form 4030)**. Qualified translators submit **a letter of verification on employer letterhead describing themselves as a translator**; certified translators show an American Translators Association certification. Get the translations onto that form before your appointment, or the day is wasted.

Tests, permit holding period and the adult shortcut

ITEM	RULE
Knowledge test	\$2.00 , and it must be started before 4:00 p.m. at the branch. The knowledge test may be taken at any branch ; the thirty-branch limit applies to the application, not the test

ITEM	RULE
Learner permit, after passing	\$2.50
Permit holding period	Under 18, 180 days ; 18 and over, at least 30 days
The adult shortcut	The agency's sentence: if you have no driving experience you must hold the permit 180 days before the road test, and if you are 18 or older that requirement does not apply
Vision screening	Mandatory; the counter test is waived if a South Carolina licensed eye care provider sends the screening result to the agency electronically (form 412-NC)
Road test	The agency administers it itself , not delegated to private courses. It also runs one-stop programs where agency-authorized instructors and examiners can test first-time applicants
If you fail the road test	Whatever your age, you wait two days and try again
Insurance for the permit	No insurance certification is requested on a permit or ID card application; the insurance, number and vision steps are all completed when you upgrade the permit to a license

WE COULD NOT VERIFY THE LANGUAGE OF THE TEST, AND WE ARE NOT INVENTING ONE

- The agency's test page, learner permit page and non-citizen page **say nothing about test languages**, and we could not reach an agency page listing them. So we write neither **"English only"** nor that Turkish is offered.
- We also **could not find** whether a Turkish version of the driver manual exists; on the pages we read the manual sits as a single English file with no language selector. Whether an interpreter may be used during the knowledge test could not be verified either.
- The only indirect signal is this: the agency requires a human translator for foreign-language **documents**, but no sentence extends that to the test.
- **What to do:** before you book, call the branch you will use, ask, and **request the answer in writing**. Do not argue it at the counter on test morning.

Renewal: a non-citizen goes in person

- The agency's sentence: if you are not a U.S. citizen you must renew your license **at one of the branches that process non-citizen applications**. The renewal page says it separately too: **if you are not a citizen you cannot renew online and you cannot renew by mail**. So the thirty-branch rule does not end with the first application; it returns at every renewal.
- **Non-citizen renewal fee: \$25** if the card is valid for more than four years, **\$12.50** if less. The shorter card costs less.
- An in-person renewal also asks for **the name of your auto insurance company**.
- **Since October 1, 2020** a vision screening is required at every license and permit renewal; it is waived if a South Carolina licensed eye care provider has electronically submitted an exam **dated within the last 36 months**, or for active duty military.

- If your license has been expired **less than nine months** it renews as if unexpired. **At nine months or more** you go to a branch with the full document set and retake the vision, knowledge and road tests.
- **There is a conflict here and we print no number.** The agency's non-citizen page states the threshold that triggers a knowledge test at renewal as **five or more** penalty points in the last two years; the renewal page conditions citizens' remote renewal eligibility on not having received **more than five** points in the last two years. Exactly five points triggers one sentence and not the other, and both are official. So we write it this way: **a point threshold within the last two years can add a knowledge test to your renewal**, and you should ask the agency's driver services unit about your own record.

Fees, and what we did not print

ITEM	FEE
Knowledge test	\$2.00
Learner permit, and permit renewal	\$2.50
Eight-year license	\$25
Non-citizen renewal, card valid more than four years	\$25
Non-citizen renewal, card valid less than four years	\$12.50
REAL ID surcharge	None, same price
Reinstating a license after an insurance suspension	\$100
All other license items	We could not read them and do not print them here. The agency's fee page and statutory fee schedule files did not render legibly; do not rely on an estimate, call the branch

YOUR TURKISH LICENSE IS NOT SURRENDERED, AND IT SHORTENS YOUR WAIT

- **Türkiye is not on the reciprocity list**, so you take both tests. The full list: American Samoa, Canada, the Federated States of Micronesia, France, Germany, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, the Marshall Islands, Palau, South Korea, Taiwan and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The motorcycle list is the same, minus South Korea and Taiwan.
- **The gap is diplomatic, not technical**, and we know that from the agency's own sentence: for a country to join the list the agency must receive **an official request from that country or its consulate**. So the absence of Türkiye is not a judgment about Turkish drivers, it is an application nobody filed. The address for that question is the Turkish mission, not the agency; do not argue it at the counter.
- **But your card is not taken from you**. Step A of MV-94 separates two things: a permit, license or ID card from **another U.S. state is surrendered** (if lost, you bring a certified driving record from that state); a license from **another country** may, in the form's own words, need to be **presented, not surrendered**.
- **And the reason for presenting it is written down: proof of prior driving experience**. That is where the practical value sits. For an applicant 18 or older the permit holding period is normally **at least 30 days**, but the agency's sentence says you must hold the permit 180 days "if you have no driving experience." For someone who drove for years in Türkiye, that card is the proof of experience. **So do not throw out your Turkish license, bring it**.
- **A South Carolina card cancels the others**. The agency's sentence: when a South Carolina ID card or license is issued to you, all licenses and ID cards previously issued by another state are canceled. It works in the other direction too.

How long can you drive without a South Carolina license?

The agency's two sentences are clear and complete each other. First: **if you are a permanent resident of another state you may drive in South Carolina on your own license**. Second, the sentence that ends visitor status: **if you move to South Carolina you must obtain a South Carolina license**. The window is **45 days**, and **that same 45 days also covers registering the vehicle**, so this state has one clock, not two. **An international driving permit is recommended, not required**: in the agency's words, if you are visiting from a country where English is not spoken it is strongly recommended that you obtain one, but the document **is not an actual license**, it only translates your card into English. There is also an exception of uncertain scope: the agency says military members and students who move to South Carolina **temporarily** are not required to obtain a license, but in the same sentence it conditions that on holding a **valid out-of-state license**, and the text **says "out-of-state", not "out-of-country"**. Whether an F-1 student can rely on that exception with a Turkish license is not written down; we do not say it is available and we do not say it is not. Do not wait on that exception, because **driving with no license at all is an arrestable offense**.

- 1 **Pick the right branch**. The Mount Pleasant branch does not serve non-citizens; the Leeds Avenue, Orleans Road and Ladson branches do. Confirm it in the agency's branch locator using the international customers filter.
- 2 **Bring two proofs of address** from two different sources showing the same address. With one document you will have taken the card without a star, and nobody will tell you that you chose it.

- 3 Prepare the number file.** Your card or an official letter if you have a number; the Social Security Administration's letter stating none was issued if you do not. Name and date of birth must match the record exactly.
- 4 Get Turkish documents translated onto form 4030** and bring the qualified translator's letter of verification on employer letterhead.
- 5 Check your visa file.** An expired visa ends REAL ID eligibility; if you are in an extension or change of status process a one-year extension exists, but originals of all entry documents are required.
- 6 Bring your Turkish license.** It is presented, not surrendered, and for an adult it cuts the permit wait from 180 days to 30.
- 7 Ask the branch about the test language,** not this guide, and get the answer in writing.
- 8 Put the 45 days on your calendar.** The same window covers the vehicle, and driving unlicensed is an arrestable offense.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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