



DHS Announces Proposed Passport Flexibility for U.S. and Canadian Children at Land and Sea Borders

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced today its intent to propose, as part of the forthcoming Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), significant flexibility regarding travel documents required for U.S. and Canadian children as part of WHTI requirements for U.S. land and sea border entry in 2008.

As early as January 1, 2008, U.S. citizens traveling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda by land or sea will be required to present a valid passport or other WHTI compliant documents, as determined by the Department of Homeland Security.

This proposal, which will be subject to public comment as part of the rulemaking process on the WHTI, would allow U.S. and Canadian citizens, ages 15 and younger with parental consent, to cross the border at land and sea ports with a certified copy of their birth certificate as an alternative to a passport or other WHTI compliant identity card. U.S. and Canadian citizen children, ages 16 through 18, traveling with public or private school groups, religious groups, social or cultural organizations or teams associated with youth athletics organizations would also be able to enter, under adult supervision, with a certified copy of their birth certificate.

The initial phase of WHTI travel document requirements went into effect last month, obligating all air travelers, regardless of age, to present a passport for entry to the United States. The DHS proposal announced today does not affect the requirements for air travel.

The Department of State will soon issue final regulations that will allow it to issue to U.S. citizens a lower cost alternative to a passport, the Passport Card. DHS will continue to issue WHTI compliant border crossing documents for frequent border crossers under its trusted traveler programs.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 mandated the WHTI travel document requirements. A formal proposed rule addressing land and sea travel will be published at a later date, with additional details on requirements for travelers entering the United States through land and sea border crossings.

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