

LAW ENFORCEMENT mDL TOOLKIT
DOC-09

mDL Officer How-To Guide

Step-by-Step Instructions for Mobile Driver License Encounters

Audience	Patrol Officers, Field Training Officers
Purpose	A plain-language, instructional guide for patrol officers on how to verify a mobile driver license, how to use the data in citations and reports, and what to do when something does not go as expected. No technical background required.
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Know Before You Go

An mDL is a real, government-issued license — not a photo. A mobile driver license stored in a digital wallet (Apple Wallet, Google Wallet, or a state app) is a genuine credential issued by the DMV. A photo or screenshot of a license is not an mDL and cannot be verified.

You need a reader. Your agency will issue or designate an approved mDL reader app or device capable of authenticating and displaying mDL data. Make sure it is charged and ready before your shift.

You never touch the driver's phone. All data transfers wirelessly. The driver keeps their device.

The driver must approve what you receive. Before any data is sent to your reader, the driver's phone will prompt them to approve the share. They have to tap 'approve.' This is automatic — you do not need to do anything extra.

Bottom Line

If your reader cannot verify it, it is not a valid mDL. Fall back to the physical license.

For a full explanation of what an mDL is and how the technology works, see DOC-01: Standards Overview.

How to Verify an mDL at a Traffic Stop

BEFORE YOU APPROACH

1. Open your mDL reader app on your assigned device.
2. Confirm it shows as ready — app open, no error messages.

AT THE VEHICLE

3. Request identification as you normally would.
4. If the driver says they have an mDL, tell them to open their wallet app and display the QR code on screen — OR hold their phone near your reader for NFC.
5. Scan the QR code with your reader, or initiate the NFC tap. Do not touch the driver's phone.
6. The driver's phone will prompt them to approve. Wait for them to tap approve.
7. Your reader displays the verified data — name, date of birth, address, DL number, license class and status, expiration date, and the driver's photo.
8. Compare the photo on your reader to the person in front of you, exactly as you would with a physical license.
9. Check the license status shown on your reader: valid, suspended, expired, or restricted.

AFTER THE VERIFICATION

10. If your reader is integrated with your CAD or reporting system, confirm that the mDL data has auto-populated your query fields, citation, or report. Correct any fields that did not populate.
11. Run your standard CIC/NCIC queries using the DL number captured from the mDL — same as any stop.
12. Complete the stop: issue citation, warning, or take other appropriate action.

Always Run Your Queries

Reading an mDL confirms the credential is authentic. It does not replace your database checks. Always run CIC/NCIC and any other required queries per agency policy.

For full workflow detail including downstream report integration (e-citation, crash report, arrest report, tow log), see DOC-04: Operational Workflows.

How to Use mDL Data in Your Reports

When your reader is integrated with your agency's CAD or field reporting software, mDL data works for you — it fills in the forms so you do not have to.

Report or Action	How mDL Data Helps
Electronic Citation (e-Citation)	Name, address, DOB, DL number, and license class auto-fill — no manual entry.
CIC / NCIC Query	DL number is auto-submitted, eliminating the transcription errors that cause missed hits.
Crash / Accident Report	All involved-party identity fields auto-populate. License status confirmed at point of contact.
Arrest Report	Booking identity comes from a verified credential — reduces identity errors at intake.
Vehicle Tow Log	Driver identity captured accurately at the time of tow.
Field Interview / Contact Card	Person contact record auto-populated and linked to your RMS master name index.

Data integration depends on the reader and CAD/FBR system your agency has deployed. If fields are not auto-populating, contact your agency's technology point of contact. See DOC-04: Operational Workflows for integration detail.

What to Do When Something Goes Wrong

Technology fails. Know what to do so the stop keeps moving.

If ...	Do This
The driver's phone is dead or damaged	Request the physical license. If they cannot produce one, follow your agency's standard procedures and applicable state law — which may include issuing a citation for failure to display a license upon demand.
Your reader cannot connect or establish a session	Request the physical license. If the driver cannot produce one, follow your agency's standard procedures and applicable state law. Report the reader failure to your agency's technology contact after the stop.
The driver declines to approve the share on their phone	Request the physical license. If they refuse to produce any ID, follow your standard protocol for an unidentified driver.
Your reader shows an authentication warning or failure	Do not accept the credential as valid. Treat the situation the same as if no credential was presented. Document the failure.
The mDL is from another state	Process it the same as an out-of-state physical license. If your reader is ISO/IEC 18013-5 compliant and has been loaded with that jurisdiction's public keys, it will authenticate the mDL. If it cannot, request the physical credential.
The driver shows a phone screen with a license image your reader cannot read	This is not a valid mDL. Request the physical credential. A visual display that cannot be read by your reader is not verified.
The driver claims to have an mDL but it is not working	Request the physical credential. If they have none, follow standard no-ID procedure.

For legal guidance on what officers can and cannot require during an mDL encounter, see DOC-07: Legal & Privacy Considerations.

What You Can and Cannot Do

YOU CAN

- Verify an mDL wirelessly without handling the driver's phone.
- Request only the data you need for the specific stop — name, DOB, DL number, license status, and photo for a routine traffic stop.
- Fall back to the physical credential at any point if the mDL cannot be verified.
- Require the physical credential — in most states, drivers are still legally required to carry one.

YOU CANNOT

- Look at or access any content on the driver's phone beyond the mDL session itself.
- Substitute a non-ISO digital product (photo, screenshot, or visual display) for a verified mDL — request the physical credential instead.
- Treat an unverified or flagged credential as valid.
- Assume everyone in the vehicle has an mDL — the holder must actively present it.

State laws on mDL acceptance vary. Know your jurisdiction's requirements and your agency's policy. See DOC-07: Legal & Privacy Considerations for full legal and privacy guidance.

Quick Reference — Traffic Stop at a Glance

1	Open reader app and confirm it is ready before approach.
2	Ask driver to open their wallet app and show the QR code — or hold phone near your reader for NFC.
3	Scan the QR code or tap NFC. Do NOT touch the driver's phone.
4	Wait for driver to approve the share on their phone.
5	Check the photo on your reader against the driver.
6	Check license status: valid, suspended, expired, or restricted.
7	Confirm mDL data auto-populated your citation / report / query fields.
8	Run CIC/NCIC queries per agency policy.
9	Complete the stop.
*	At any point — if the reader fails or the driver cannot present — request the physical license.

Related Toolkit Documents

- **DOC-01:** Standards Overview — what an mDL is, how it works, and the national deployment landscape
- **DOC-04:** Operational Workflows — full step-by-step workflow and downstream report integration detail
- **DOC-07:** Legal & Privacy Considerations — officer authority, data handling, and CJIS requirements
- **DOC-08:** Training Plan Framework — agency training curriculum and competency standards
- **DOC-10:** mDL FAQs for Law Enforcement — answers to common questions about mDL technology