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No passport means no travel

Lack of a birth certificate starts the trouble

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After trying for a year to get a passport, Anna MacKinnon of Southgate was despairing this week. The U.S. Passport Agency rejected her application.

The grounds? She can't prove she was born.

"I don't know what to do now," she said, looking at the mess of forms and letters on her otherwise tidy kitchen table.

On Tuesday, a new law will require passports for all Americans flying

home from other countries, even Canada. In January 2008, passports will be needed at all land and sea borders.

That means more Michiganders will need passports. Just 30% have them now.

But for people whose birth certificates are funky, photocopied, missing or filed long after their births, the change spells trouble.

A birth certificate proves you are a citizen. And you need one to get a passport.

"It's the most important document. It proves you were born inside the United States. A driver's license

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won't do it. A Social Security card won't do it," says David Koelsch, immigration law professor at University of Detroit Mercy Law School. Missing birth certificates in passport and visa matters "are a huge problem, especially with immigrants. But even U.S. citizens are being rejected for passports."

These days, states and counties make it easy to order certified copies of your own birth certificate. Washt-

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MARY SCHROEDER/Detroit Free Press

Anna MacKinnon of Southgate spreads her passport paperwork on her kitchen table.

