

## Law aims to crimp plans of 'sovereign citizens'

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With a gold seal for authentication and signatures from Indiana's governor and secretary of state, the "Certificate of Non-Citizen Nationality" that a Lafayette man presented to the Fairfield Township Trustee's office last August appeared legitimate

But the man's ramblings — he came in demanding his "world passport" — made no sense to Trustee Julie Roush or her employee.

"He was saying that he submitted this with the federal government and that he could pick up his passport with the smallest form of government," Roush said. "That's townships in Indiana.

"I called the state a couple times about it because we'd never heard of this. They revealed to me, 'Be prepared to call the cops.' "

That was her introduction to sovereign citizenship, an ideology that has slowly gained traction across the United States and asserts that American-born citizens answer only to independent authority and not the government.

Its followers rely largely on common law to justify why they're exempt from certain rules and regulations, from taxes to traffic tickets.

After the man stopped in the trustee's office, Roush sent a letter to Lafayette legislators stating, "I view these people as a threat to my staff and other government offices."

The man was initially confrontational but eventually calmed down, she said.

Part of the problem, Roush believes, is this: In Indiana, people who declare themselves as noncitizens or sovereign heads of their own nation can get certain documents authenticated by the state because of a loophole in the system.

Authentication means only that a notarized document was done by a commissioned notary, Roush said, and does not apply to the context of the document, such as a "Certificate of Non-citizen Nationality." But the gold and signatures make it look official.

"It looks real. It looks really professional," Roush said. She's concerned some are doing it to get out of paying taxes or fines. "They think they're entitled to it."

Valerie Kroeger, communications director for Secretary of State Connie Lawson, said it has been an ongoing issue for her office.

"What they do is, they come in with these documents to get an apostille, which is an authentication for documents for foreign use," she said. "Most people don't know what an apostille is, and that's how they're claiming their documents are legit — by putting our seal on there."

Kroeger said some help could come from House Bill 1054, which was passed unanimously by the Senate and House of Representatives this past session. Gov. Mike Pence signed the bill Wednesday.

HB 1054 would allow the secretary of state's office to refuse to accept certain filings or recordings.

“Before, we had to take all these documents,” Kroger said.