

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS & PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR HOUSING INSECURITY



Identity documents (IDs) are vital keys necessary to open the doors to so many parts of everyday life. However, there are key system-level failures that create significant obstacles to IDs for many people, causing severe, yet avoidable harm. This infographic highlights some of the unique impacts on people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. See MAP's [new report](#) to learn more about the obstacles to ID, the harms caused from a lack of ID, and recommendations for improving ID access for everyone.

SYSTEM FAILURES CREATE OBSTACLES TO ID



Burdensome documentation requirements for IDs can be difficult in the best of circumstances, but for people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, even the most basic piece of required information poses a major obstacle: having a permanent mailing address. Some jurisdictions may allow people to use the address of a shelter or social service agency, but that assumes that people are able to safely access those services, which many people cannot, as discussed below. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness may simply no longer have access to the key documents typically required for IDs, especially if their housing loss was caused by domestic violence, family estrangement, or disasters such as fires or floods.



IDs are needlessly expensive, with a new driver's license costing an average of 4.1 hours of work at minimum wage and as much as 8.7 hours of minimum wage work. While some states or jurisdictions may, in some circumstances, waive the financial costs associated with getting or updating IDs, this typically requires even further paperwork or applications for such waivers, adding to already burdensome documentation requirements. For people experiencing homelessness, these waivers may also require the signature of a social service provider, but again these providers may not be available to all, or may not treat all people equally, as discussed below.



Shelters or social service providers can assist people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity with getting IDs, but these providers sometimes **discriminate**. For example, a 2015 national survey showed that 70% of transgender people who stayed in a homeless shelter in the past year reported some form of mistreatment, including being harassed, assaulted, or kicked out of the shelter. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness and people without accurate ID both face increased problems with law enforcement, which in turn exacerbates obstacles to ID. In a survey by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 60% of people experiencing homelessness were harassed by police or arrested when they could not produce an ID. When police or government workers destroy homeless encampments, this also often leads to the destruction or confiscation of the few belongings that people may have, including their IDs.

LACK OF ID CAUSES CONCRETE, YET AVOIDABLE HARM



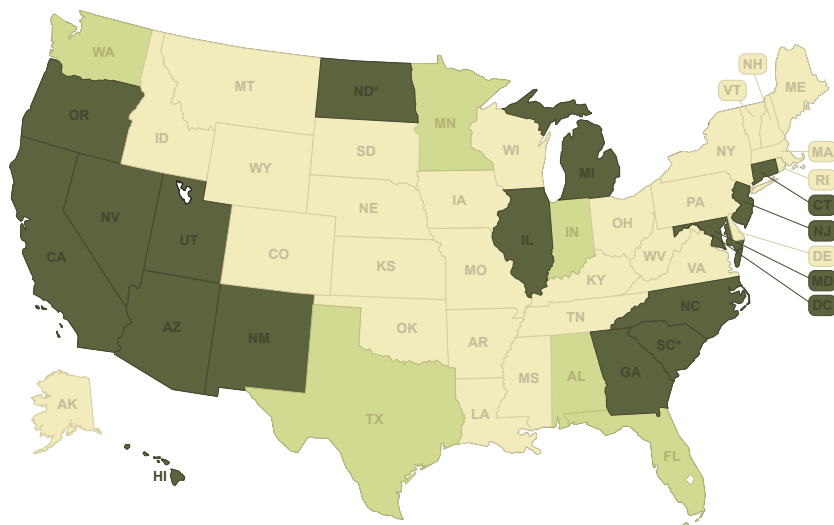
A lack of ID **blocks access to basic needs**, such as housing, health care, or employment. Exiting homelessness or housing insecurity is already an extraordinarily difficult uphill battle, let alone doing so without an ID that is so often required for applications for even temporary housing, urgent medical care, or employment. This may be further complicated for families experiencing homelessness: if one family member lacks a required form of ID, or an ID that can verify the relationships between family members, the family may be forced to choose between staying together but unhoused, or splitting up and having shelter for only some family members.



A lack of ID **limits access to essential services**, even those that are specifically designed for people experiencing economic hardships, including homelessness or housing insecurity. Many social service agencies are located in government buildings, which often require ID to even enter the building, let alone apply for services. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness are frequently denied public benefits specifically due to lack of photo ID: a survey by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty showed that 53% of people experiencing homelessness were denied food stamps, 51% were denied Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, and 31% were denied Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) benefits, all due to a lack of photo ID.

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FEWER THAN HALF OF STATES OFFER WAIVERS OR REDUCED FEES FOR IDS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



*North Dakota and South Carolina offer free non-driver IDs to all adults.

Source: MAP review of state ID office websites (Aug 2022). For more, visit this infographic's [citations](#).

- State offers free or reduced fee IDs for people experiencing homelessness (16 states + D.C.)
- State offers free or reduced fee IDs for homeless youth (6 states)
- No known ID fee policies specifically for people experiencing homelessness (28 states)

Currently, at least 22 states and Washington D.C. offer free or reduced fee IDs specifically for at least some people experiencing homelessness, for at least one form of state-issued ID. However, these policies vary widely from state to state and also require additional paperwork, such as an official letter verifying the person's housing status and signed by a social worker or service provider—assuming that people experiencing homelessness have safe, reliable access to such service

“AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION”: UNHOUSED AND UNABLE TO GET ID

In Minnesota, a woman called D.N. (her initials, for privacy) has spent years caught in a cycle of lacking an ID yet being unable to get one. As a refugee from Liberia, her family lost her original birth certificate amid the country's civil war that led to their migration to the United States when she was only one year old. Because D.N. does not have her Liberian birth certificate, U.S. immigration authorities would not process her application to become a U.S. citizen. Lacking both a birth certificate and U.S. citizenship, she has struggled to secure stable housing—and once COVID-19 hit, she was evicted from the housing she had managed to find. She and her two children spent more than a year being unhoused, and while she eventually found a sympathetic landlord who would rent to her without an ID, this leaves her housing stability entirely dependent on that individual landlord. She remains afraid to apply for many forms of public assistance (including subsidized housing) for fear of raising new troubles with immigration officials or losing her children to the state.

“Can you imagine: you're trying to figure out where you're gonna lay your head, and everything you own is in a backpack, and it gets stolen? I've had clients who had their bag stolen and their green card was in it,” reported a housing case manager. A Minnesota housing advocate said this: “We have these restrictive ID laws—it's a Catch-22. They're asking someone to get this documentation that the state tells me I cannot have without another form of identification, which I also don't have. It puts people in an impossible situation.”

Adapted from: Yusra Murad. Sept 26, 2021. “[No driver's license? No housing. Minnesota immigrants, advocates say missing government-issued IDs keep people out of stable homes.](#)” *Sahan Journal*.

Learn more about identity documents in MAP's new report:

THE ID DIVIDE: HOW BARRIERS TO ID IMPACT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND AFFECT US ALL

<http://www.mapresearch.org/id-documents-report>

