



COLORADO CENTER  
on LAW & POLICY

# Remove barriers to identification to improve access to benefits

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*Policy Proposal for the  
Economic Opportunity  
Poverty Reduction  
Task Force*

## Highlights:

- **Valid IDs are critical for many jobs and public services**
- **Barriers to IDs prevent people from reaching self-sufficiency**

## Potential solutions:

- **Ease arduous documentation requirements**
- **Add alternatives for documentation**
- **Expand the waiver process**

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Colorado law requires that people who apply for public benefits must have a valid government identification. For many Coloradans this is more difficult than it seems. They are unable to get the services they need because of problems obtaining an ID. There are several categories of people who struggle to get a valid ID:

- Domestic violence victims who may have fled in a hurry, leaving behind their legal documents. Perpetrators have also been known to destroy or hide documents to discourage flight.
- Older adults who may have been born without a birth certificate, or whose records have been lost over the years, especially prior to computerization.
- People with severe disabilities, illnesses or frailties, or who are hospitalized for whom the physical demands of the trip to the motor vehicle office may be too difficult
- People with severe developmental disabilities or dementia who may not be able to recall key facts needed in the process of obtaining identification.
- Homeless people who may have had possessions stolen or destroyed.
- Victims of crime or disasters who lose essential documents.
- Other destitute people who cannot afford to buy the essential documents needed to obtain identification.

## Background

To get a valid Colorado ID or driver's license, a person needs to prove lawful presence\*, identity, name and age. If a person does not already possess an ID or driver's license, lawful presence is usually confirmed by a certified original birth certificate. Obtaining replacement birth certificates can be arduous, expensive and time consuming. The birth certificate needs to be paired with other documents to prove the person's identity.

The Colorado Collaborative ID Project assists about 5,000 people a year who have trouble obtaining IDs. The Colorado Lawyers Committee has provided 22 volunteers for that project. The lawyers committee says that on average it takes one of its lawyers nearly eight months and 60 hours of an attorney's time to obtain an ID for clients.

## Problem

There can be many challenges to obtaining an ID.

- Original birth certificates can be difficult to obtain and the process can be time-consuming, which delays the receipt of critical benefits.
- "One off." Documents that can verify the identity of a person sometimes have names spelled slightly differently than the birth certificate.
- Name changes, which are often required to resolve "one off" problems, can be costly and time-consuming.

**Potential solutions:**

- Exempt people 55 and older from the statute that requires recipients of public benefits to have a state issued photo identification.
- Allow state departments that administer public benefits to issue waivers that would allow people to receive benefits even without a state issued photo ID.
- Allow people who receive federal benefits to obtain a state issued photo ID in the name listed on the federal benefits if they are also able to verify their identity with other permissible documents.
- Create a court process that would grant judges the authority to issue photo IDs and birth certificates to people who either do not have all of the necessary documents or who have documents with names that are spelled slightly differently.
- Accelerate the process for name changes for low-income seniors by waiving the filing fee, removing the fingerprint requirement and eliminating the legal posting requirement.

\*With the passage of 2013 SB 251, non-citizens without lawful presence can obtain Colorado Driver's Licenses and ID cards, with proof of Colorado residency, Colorado income tax returns, a federal individual taxpayer ID number and proof of identity issued by the applicant's country of origin. These documents will have the words "Not Valid for Federal Identification, Voting or Public Benefits Purposes".

