

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS & TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

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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 obstacles for transgender and nonbinary people—obstacles that are becoming even more extreme as political attacks from both state and federal governments escalate under the new Trump administration. See MAP's [report](#) to learn more about 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



Transgender people must navigate a **complicated patchwork of state policies**, as the requirements and processes to get a legal name change or update a gender marker vary from state to state and even from one form of ID to another. In many states—and now at the federal level as well, following Trump's executive order affecting passports—the policies are outright **discriminatory** in that they explicitly refuse to allow transgender people to update their gender marker or create significant obstacles to doing so. Transgender and nonbinary people may also experience discrimination when they try to update their IDs: in a Center for American Progress survey, 66% of transgender people said discrimination had an impact on their ability to update their documents in the past year alone.



The patchwork of policies is further complicated by **burdensome and often circular documentation requirements**. The fact that a person often needs one form of accurate ID (such as a birth certificate) to get another ID (such as a driver's license) means that updating any document is particularly challenging for transgender people. For example, a transgender person who is not able or not allowed to update their birth certificate will then be unable to update their driver's license, depending on the laws of the state where they were born and/or currently live.



Getting or updating an ID is **needlessly expensive**, especially when needing to update multiple forms of IDs as transgender people often do to reflect their name or gender identity. This is a significant obstacle, as roughly 30% of transgender people live in poverty—nearly two times the poverty rate of non-transgender people. In a national survey, 35% of transgender and nonbinary people who had not changed their legal name, as well as 32% of those who had not updated the gender marker on their IDs, said that cost was the main barrier to doing so.

LACK OF ID CAUSES CONCRETE, YET AVOIDABLE HARM



Overall, **68%** of transgender adults lack any government-issued ID that matches their name and gender identity. By contrast, roughly 12% of all adults lack a valid driver's license. Transgender people without accurate ID report higher rates of harassment, discrimination, and even violence.



A lack of ID **blocks access to basic needs**, such as housing, health care, or employment. People whose IDs do not match their name or gender identity may also face obstacles accessing health care or getting insurance to cover needed medical care typically associated with a particular gender. In the U.S. Transgender Survey, people who had accurate IDs were less likely to have housing-related issues and were treated better when accessing health care.



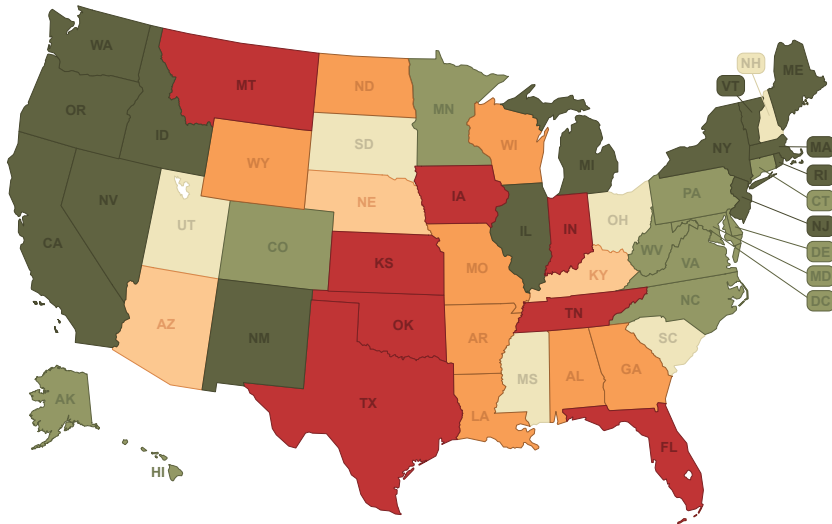
A lack of ID **limits access to everyday life**, such as going to restaurants, movie theaters, and other places of public accommodations. In a nationwide 2015 survey, 32% of transgender people who showed an ID that did not match their gender were verbally harassed, denied services or asked to leave the establishment, or even assaulted or attacked.



A lack of ID **restricts participation in civic life**, and especially the ability to vote. As states pass increasingly strict ID requirements for voting, transgender people in states that have burdensome requirements or outright bans on updating IDs may not be able to vote. And, if the 2025 federal SAVE Act becomes law, many transgender people may be entirely prevented from even registering to vote.

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HALF OF STATES OFFER MODERNIZED, STREAMLINED PROCESSES ALLOWING TRANSGENDER PEOPLE TO UPDATE THEIR BIRTH CERTIFICATE



- State updates birth certificates using an administrative process and does not require provider documentation (14 states)
- State updates birth certificates using an administrative process and requires provider documentation of "appropriate treatment" (11 states, 1 territory + D.C.)
- State has unclear process and/or unclear medical requirements left to the discretion of individual judges (see citations for more information) (6 states, 3 territories)
- State updates birth certificates using an administrative process but requires proof of surgery (3 states)
- State updates birth certificates but requires both a court order and proof of surgery (8 states, 1 territory)
- State does not allow for amending the gender marker on the birth certificate (8 states)

U.S. Territories



Source: Movement Advancement Project. As of March 20, 2025.

IMPORTANCE OF ID ACCESS FOR ALL

Everyone, including transgender people, should be treated with dignity and respect. That includes when it comes to identity documents. Like all of us, transgender people need accurate and consistent identity documents that reflect who we are. That's what IDs are for. These documents allow us to travel, start new jobs, open bank accounts, find stable housing, enroll in school, participate in civic life, and so much more.

Having identification that matches who you are is a matter of basic safety and dignity. When a transgender person is forced to show an ID that doesn't match who they are, they can face harassment, discrimination, and even violence. Survey data show that nearly a third of transgender people across the country were verbally harassed, denied benefits or service, asked to leave, or even assaulted after showing an ID that did not match their gender presentation. Being unable to update IDs would also make transgender people more likely to be falsely accused of fraud or denied jobs, loans, or apartments simply because their ID doesn't match who they are and how they live everyday.

Imposing burdensome and invasive requirements like proof of surgery or other medical care is not only unnecessary, but unjust. People already self-report information such as height, weight, hair color, and eye color on state IDs and licenses. Every person, including transgender people, knows their gender best, and should be able to self-attest just like we do for the rest of our ID information. Completely banning transgender people from updating their IDs would put them in an impossible position and cause significant harm, increasing the risk of harassment and violence against this already vulnerable group of people.

Learn more about identity documents in MAP's report:

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

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

