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Vanishing into Society: The Harsh Reality of Living without an ID

Tony Simmons felt invisible. Without valid identification, he couldn't get housing, work, food stamps, and medication. Tony, a former marine I met on my Volunteer Venture trip in Baltimore, told me about how he learned it was virtually impossible to escape poverty without a form of government-issued photo ID. For low-income Americans, IDs are a lifeline — a key to unlocking services and opportunities, from housing to jobs to education. As of 2006, up to 11 percent of U.S. adults had no government-issued photo ID (Brennan Center for Justice). Since then, federal requirements for IDs have grown tougher, contributing to a loop that can help keep people trapped in poverty. In states with strict voter ID laws, the lack of an ID can even hinder voting. “This is a huge issue for people who are homeless and poor,” says Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. “Without an ID, basically you don't exist” (Bradley).

It's next to impossible to function in the modern world without any form of government-issued identification. You need a government-issued photo ID to open a bank account, sign a lease, get married, sign up for food assistance, apply for welfare, and in some instances, even stay at a homeless shelter. Other strange examples of things you need to prove your identity for include adopting a pet and holding a rally/protest (Schow). It is quite tragic that millions of Americans do not possess something so necessary for survival. A study done by the Brennan Center for Justice found that more than one in ten voting-age adults did not have a current and valid government-issued photo ID (Brennan Center for Justice). To put that number into

perspective, that is around 36 million Americans nationwide. Their report also found that this percentage is even higher among seniors, minorities, people with disabilities, low-income voters, and students. Although this inequality disproportionately affects a wide array of groups, I will particularly focus on the disparities across race and income. They reported that around twenty-five percent of African American voting-age citizens have no current government-issued photo ID, compared to eight percent of white voting-age citizens (Brennan Center for Justice). Another noticeable thing the Brennan Center for Justice found was that citizens earning less than \$35,000 per year are more than twice as likely to lack current government-issued photo identification as those earning more than \$35,000 (Brennan Center for Justice). These statistics paint quite a clear picture that there is an inequality that disproportionately affects both minority and low-income Americans. Later in the paper, I will be going into the potential causes and consequences of why these two groups are more likely to not have a government-issued photo ID.

The Brennan Center's report documented the findings of a survey conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation, a well-respected independent research firm. In 2006, the telephone survey of 987 randomly selected voting age American citizens conducted by ORC followed standard industry practice in terms of survey design, selecting the appropriate number of survey participants for statistically significant results, random selection of survey participants, and method of questioning survey participants. Since its publication, the Brennan Center's report has been widely cited by scholars, legal experts, and the media, and its findings have been widely accepted. Other independent studies have also repeatedly confirmed their principal findings. It is also worth noting that the survey results likely underestimate the total number of American citizens who do not have readily available documentation since there is potential coverage bias in traditional telephone surveys among low income and rural populations. Due to

these groups being more likely to not have telephones, they are more likely to not be included in the results of these surveys.

When analyzing the harms that come with not having an ID, the framework of the capabilities approach can be helpful. The capabilities approach is drawn from the work of Martha Nussbaum, who is building off economist Amartya Sen. Nussbaum proposes that people ought to have the *capability*, or ability, to achieve all the basic needs of humanity if they choose. A life without these capabilities might be described as a life experiencing poverty, a deficit of the dignity essential to a flourishing human life. Nussbaum elaborates on this point when she talks about how “...because we are dignified beings capable of political reciprocity, therefore we had better provide for times when we are not that, so we can get back to being that as quickly as possible” (Nussbaum, 54). Since a sense of worth and dignity is inherent within every human being, Nussbaum argues that everyone has a claim to certain basic capabilities and functionings as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires. Although there are multiple harms associated with not having an ID, I will be focusing on three important ones. The first harm I will be examining through the lens of Nussbaum’s capability approach is related to the central capability of bodily health.

Having a government photo-issued ID is critical to accessing social benefits. According to a survey by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, in a given month in 2004, 54 percent of homeless people without a photo ID were denied access to shelters or housing services, 53 percent were denied food stamps, and 45 percent were denied access to Medicaid or other medical services (Wiltz). Additionally, since you need an ID to access most federal, state, and county buildings, those without one are unable to utilize the very social support agencies that are designed to help them. Through understanding how not having an ID can prevent one from

accessing these social benefits, one can see how this harm is an infringement to Nussbaum's central capability of bodily health. Nussbaum describes the bodily health capability as "...being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter" (Nussbaum 41). Without an ID, one's capabilities are thwarted as one cannot access social benefits such as SNAP or Section 8 housing vouchers that can greatly benefit one's bodily health. Debra Hayes, executive director of a homeless men's shelter, sadly talks about this situation in an article from Pew Charitable Trusts. Hayes says, "When they give up on having an ID, they give up on the resources available to them" (Wiltz).

Not having an ID goes far beyond not being able to access social benefits and programs. Without an ID, it greatly hinders one from acquiring a job. Mark Kessenich, who runs a center to train low-income workers for living-wage jobs in Milwaukee, says that having an ID "...is a very common requirement for the sorts of job [sic] that can actually lift people out of poverty—those in construction, manufacturing, security, and unions jobs including electricians and plumbers" (Semuels). This displays another violation of one's capabilities as those without an ID are disqualified to work before they even send in an application. Julie Kerksick, a senior policy advocate at the Public Policy Institute of Community Advocates in Milwaukee, says that many positions even "...use a driver's license as a proxy for whether you're employable" (Semuels). In jobs ranging from a retail security officer to a deli clerk, valid driver's licenses are a prerequisite. Licenses, to employers, signal responsibility, and not having one could put someone at a significant disadvantage in finding employment. This is a significant harm as the stable income from employment is crucial to breaking out of the cycle of homelessness. There have been considerable amounts of data that show how work is the best and most effective way to lift able-bodied people out of poverty. An analysis conducted by Moynihan Prize winners, Ron Haskins

and Isabel Sawhill found that increasing work rates had by far the biggest impact in reducing poverty (Haskins). Using data from the Census Bureau, they consistently found that unemployment yields exceptionally high poverty rates. In 2014, for example, as compared with a poverty rate of 3% among full-time workers, the poverty rate for non-workers was 33.7%.

Work enables people to increase their earnings which in turn provides them with self-sufficiency and economic mobility. However, work is more than just a means of income generation. Work also provides adults and their families with a time structure, a source of status and identity, a sense of collective purpose, and an opportunity for social engagement outside family life. Jerod Waltman, a professor of Political Science at Baylor University expresses the value of work in his book, The Case For The Living Wage. Waltman says, “It is the way people feel and the extra effort they make when they have a sense of dignity and feel treated with respect. This is tangible [sic], to be sure, but it is real, as anyone who has worked in any type of organization can testify” (Waltman 135). Through this passage, it is clearly expressed that there is an inherent value in work. Work gives people a sense of accomplishment and increased self-worth with people seeing them valued higher in society. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2021 underscores the importance of work as they looked at what makes life meaningful. After surveying nearly 19,000 adults across 17 advanced economies, they found that work or your occupation is the second most common source of meaning, falling just behind family and children (Silver, Laura, et al). Not only is work good for the individual, but it benefits society at large because it promotes a sense of trust, tolerance, and respect between people. Considering the many benefits that come with work, the individuals without an ID that are unable to obtain a job are significantly harmed.

Another capability thwarted by not having an ID is control over one's environment. Nussbaum refers to this central capability as the ability "to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association" (Nussbaum 42). Not having an ID directly affects this capability as those individuals without one are often times unable to vote and participate in the democratic process. Currently, 35 states have laws requiring people to show some form of identification before they can vote (NCSL). These include current swing states such as Georgia, Arizona, Ohio, and Wisconsin as well as states with large African American and Latino populations, such as Texas. With these requirements in place, those without an ID are far more likely to be unable to politically participate. In this way, historically privileged groups with an ID can have a greater say over policies and other decisions. This problem has not gone unnoticed as in 2012, a federal court in Washington concluded that the burden of obtaining a state voter-ID certificate would weigh disproportionately on minorities living in poverty, with many having to travel as much as 200 to 250 miles round trip. In the panel's 56-page opinion, David S. Tatel, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, wrote "That law will almost certainly have retrogressive effect: it imposes strict, unforgiving burdens on the poor, and racial minorities in Texas are disproportionately likely to live in poverty" (Horwitz). Anthony Settles, a retired engineer from Texas has dealt with this problem firsthand. While he has his Social Security card and old student ID from the University of Houston, he does not have a current Texas photo ID which he needs to vote in the presidential election. In an interview discussing his difficult journey of obtaining an ID Settles says, "It has been a bureaucratic nightmare. The intent of this law is to suppress the vote. I feel like I am not wanted in this state" (Horwitz). Unfortunately, the historically marginalized and low-income groups who are far more likely to not have an ID have

consequently dealt with voter suppression and are unable to participate in the democratic process. As you can see, having an ID affects multiple fundamental functionings that are important to a decent human life. Having noticed this, I will now be going into the potential policies and practices giving rise to this overarching problem.

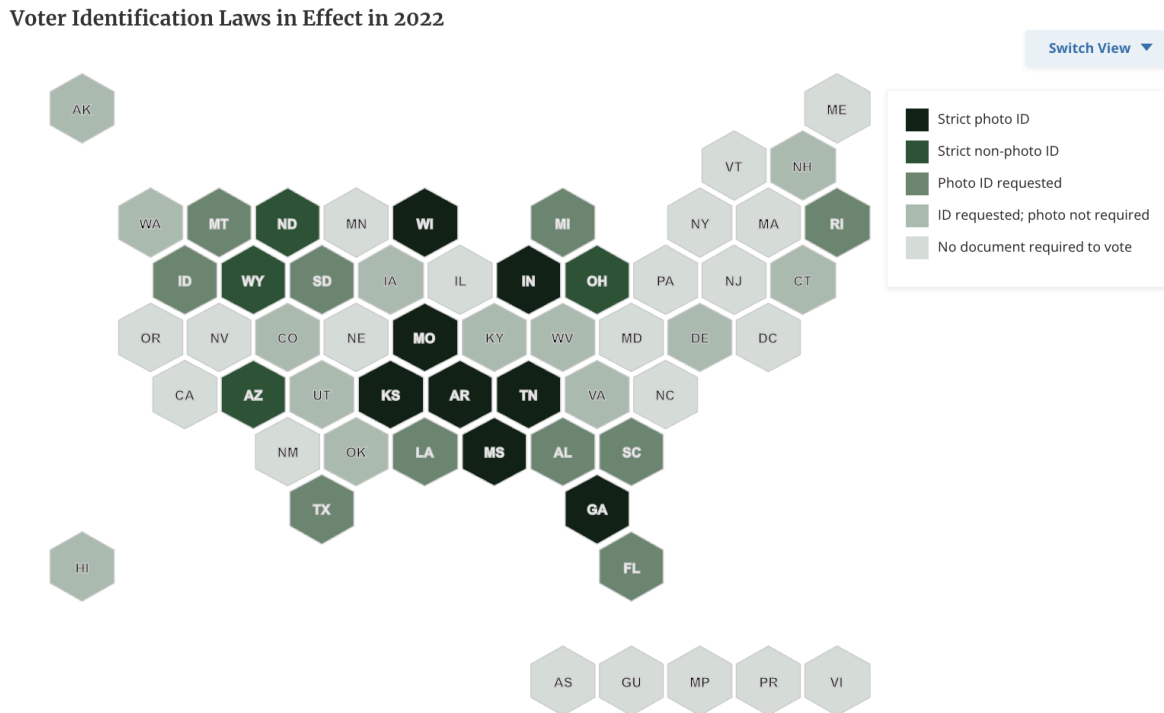


Figure 1: *US Map of Voter Identification Laws by State.* Thirty Five States require or request voters to show some form of identification at polls, Eighteen States ask for a photo ID.

It is no coincidence that both minority and low-income Americans are more likely to not possess a form of government photo ID. Unfortunately, there are multiple structures at play that reduce the choices that these groups have. Due to this, looking at only individual explanations for these inequalities is insufficient and can cause one to overlook the social structures and systems that thwart certain people’s capabilities. To examine the social structures at play that influence these groups’ actions, I am going to lay out a hypothetical story that is based on real-life experiences. While these stories will not cover everyone’s experiences, they will highlight

how various social structures can constrain an individual's actions in ways that could result in one not being able to obtain a government photo ID.

As defined by Eastwood and Smith, "Social structures are durable, individual-spanning phenomena that enable and constrain our choices and that are themselves made of our interdependent choices" (Eastwood and Smith, 3). Although social structures are extremely complex in nature, Eastwood breaks them down into three different forms: rules, representations, and relationships. Within the example I provide, one will be able to see how these social structures can take on these different forms and interlock to constrain one from obtaining a government photo ID.

Imagine the situation of Jane Doe, a single mother who is experiencing poverty. In order to secure a job and housing opportunity that expires in a few days, Jane is told she needs a valid form of government photo ID. Unfortunately, she had her ID stolen last month and is starting to realize the insurmountable difficulties of functioning in society without one. Having your ID stolen is not unusual for those who are homeless. Vic Modin, a 69-year-old man from Detroit, said, "You'll be surprised how many people are out there on the street and get a backpack stolen with ID in it, and how that can turn your life upside down" (Kurth). Additionally, Jane desperately needs an ID to prove kinship so she could enroll her kids in childcare/school and apply for nutrition assistance. For most people replacing a lost driver's license is a minor inconvenience that consists of scheduling and taking a trip to the dreaded DMV. However, for Jane, the path to getting an ID is more like a high-stakes test of endurance and resourcefulness.

The situation of Jane is not uncommon. After getting abruptly evicted from his home in Flint, Michigan, Robert Giddings was left with nothing as his landlord threw out all of things, including his ID. With no form of identification, Giddings was unable to apply for social benefits

or get the medical care that he desperately needed for his untreated cataracts. In an interview with Stateline, Giddings says, “It was pretty hard. You can’t go to the doctor. I couldn’t cash any checks. I couldn’t apply for food stamps” (Wiltz). To get an ID which Giddings soon learned was an essential item, he would embark on a similar journey to Jane that took almost a year in total. They both faced an extraordinary difficult catch-22 situation: how do you prove your identity if you don’t have an ID and can prove you exist?

Jane has spent over a month visiting government agencies, looking for guidance on how to receive an ID without success. While one may think government agencies guide people through the process of getting an ID since they are the ones issuing them, many times they offer little help. Foundry, a nonprofit that helps people secure identity documents says that “providing instructions on what to do” is their most important task (Bradley). The arduous process of obtaining an ID has led to her taking many visits to the DMV as she was unaware of the process of acquiring an ID and the needed documentation to obtain one. Many low-income Americans like Jane believe that they could get a form of identification immediately and do not know the timeline they face. This burden weighs heavier on Jane who must miss work or arrange for childcare to make the trip. Many times, these burdens can prolong the process or stop it altogether. Reverend Ben Roberts who oversees Foundry’s ID options have observed this happen firsthand. He says, “At this point, you’re getting your identity verified at three, maybe four different places, one of which is a doctor’s office. How in the hell is a doctor supposed to know?” (Bradley).

The trip to Jane’s nearest DMV is over 15 miles away and without a car, she must spend multiple hours of her day on public transportation. Additionally, the DMV in her area is only open a few hours a week, and rarely on weekends or in the evening. These travel and time costs

to obtain a photo ID affects millions of Americans according to a study done by Gaskins and Iyer of the Brennan Center. Their research found that 10 million eligible voters live more than 10 miles from their nearest state ID-issuing office open more than two days a week. They also noticed that these obstacles are extremely burdensome for low-income and minority citizens. In the 10 states with restrictive voting laws, they found that more than 1 million eligible voters fall below the federal poverty line and live more than 10 miles from their nearest ID-issuing office open more than two days a week. This group of Americans may also be more susceptible to not affording the costly supporting documentation — such as birth certificates or marriage licenses — required to apply for photo ID. Furthermore, in these 10 states, 1.2 million black and 500,000 Hispanic eligible voters live more than 10 miles from their nearest state ID-issuing office open more than two days a week. The results they found show that travel and time costs disproportionately affect low-income and minority Americans, which may play a key role in why these groups are more likely to not have a photo ID.

They obtained their findings by studying, state ID issuing office information, 2010 census group block data, and poverty statistics at the 2010 census tract level from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates. It is important to note that all distances discussed in their report were straight line distances and do not represent travel distances. The straight-line distances represent the shortest possible geometric route between two points. This means that their counts of people living more than 10 miles from an ID office significantly underestimate the number of people who must travel more than 10 miles to obtain an ID. As mentioned earlier, even if someone can travel to an ID office, the nearest location may not keep standard business hours. Many times, these offices have irregular or reduced hours. While this is understandable considering the possibility that offices in an extremely rural areas

may have low foot traffic, reduced and irregular hours may pose significant problems for people like Jane who need photo identification.

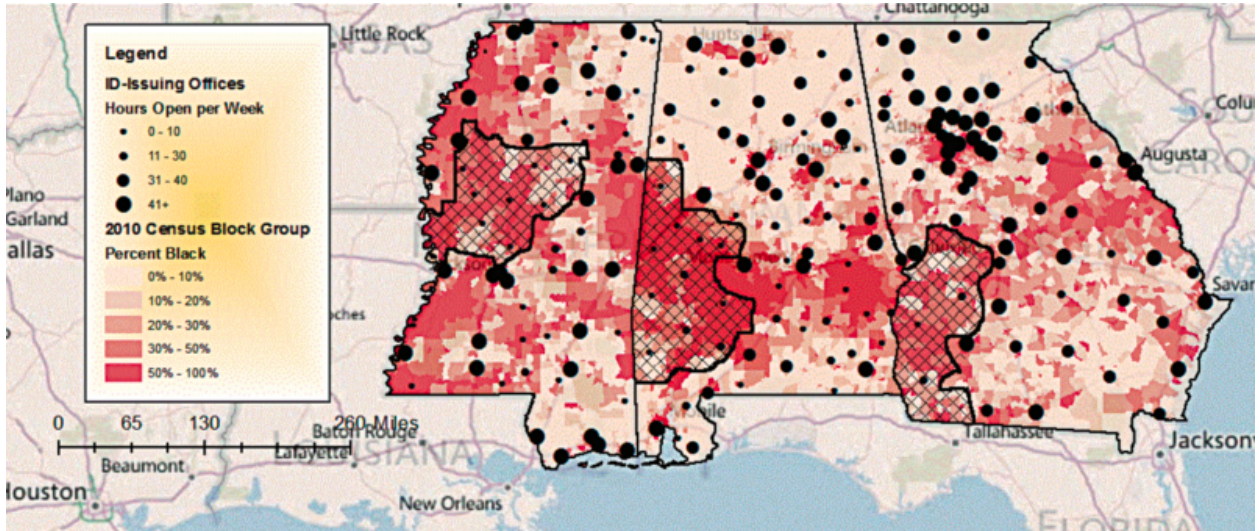


Figure 2: *Percentage Black and State Driver's License Offices, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.* The map demonstrates that in the areas with the greatest concentrations of rural black voters, no state driver's license offices are open more than two days per week. The figure also shows that many of these states' part-time offices are located in the areas with the highest concentrations of black voters.

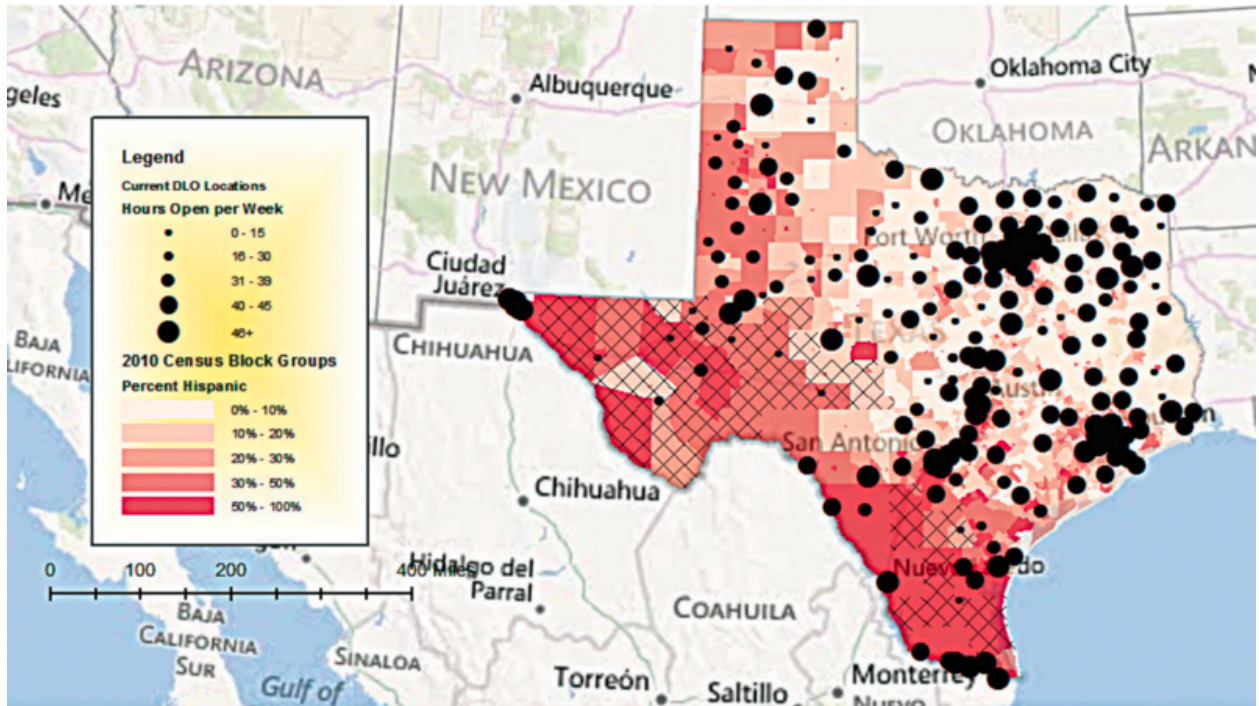


Figure 3: *Percentage Hispanic Population and Driver’s License Office Locations, Texas.* The map shows that in some areas in Texas with high concentrations of Hispanic voters, there are few or no ID-issuing offices. The map depicts concentrations of the Hispanic voting-age population, by 2010 Census Block Group, together with the number of hours per week each office location is open.

Once Jane arrives at the DMV, she learns that she lacks multiple proofs of identity such as utility bills or birth certificates to obtain an ID. Getting a state-issued ID can be difficult and expensive, requiring a large amount of official documentation that can be hard for low-income people to keep track of and even harder to replace. With the statewide adoption of “Real ID,” the barriers to receiving an ID have increased. Previously, obtaining an ID usually required one primary document or two original secondary documents. Under the new law, “to get a state-issued driver’s license or identification card, applicants must provide identification documents,

such as a birth certificate, marriage certificate (for name changes), and original Social Security card, plus two proofs of residency in that state, such as credit card or utility bills, vehicle registration or a bank statement” (Povich). Numerous government officials and citizens say there are good reasons for these requirements: terrorism and security. Some also believe that these requirements are needed to prevent voter fraud. A lot of proponents for strict ID laws have supported and created a representation that those who do not have an ID will participate in voter fraud. Many people also assume that almost everyone has an ID and that these requirements are not a big deal. They have a vested interest in passing these laws to ensure legal voting as they believe voter fraud has disadvantaged candidates they supported in the past. Hans von Spakovsky, manager of the Election Law Reform Initiative at the conservative Heritage Foundation, has said “Voters who have to show ID constantly in their everyday lives certainly don’t see ID as a problem. It is a -common-sense, basic requirement needed to ensure election integrity, which is an essential part of free and fair elections” (Horwitz). While these concerns are understandable, getting an ID has become significantly harder for low-income groups who are much more likely to not have any of these documents on them. Due to this, Jane sees herself in an extremely difficult circumstance. In order to obtain a government photo ID that she desperately needs, she has to face additional administrative barriers to get a social security card and birth certificate that she misplaced.

As Jane works to obtain these documents, she faces another difficult obstacle. Many low-income Americans are not able to afford the costs of securing identity documents. Jane faces other mounting expenses, and she worries about how she can afford to obtain these documents. Birth certificates can range from \$25 in California to \$12 in South Carolina, and these fees rise quickly when assisting an entire family (Bradley). This is significant as a birth certificate and

other forms of identification are needed to obtain an ID which also usually has a fee involved. Anthony Settles who I mentioned earlier, was someone like Jane who became deterred by the high costs involved with getting the identification documents he needed to vote. After searching records in courthouses in the D.C. area where he grew up, Settles could not find his name-change certificate from 1964 to match his birth certificate to qualify for his new ID card. Unfortunately, “To obtain a new document changing his name to the one he has used for 51 years, Settles has to go to court, a process that would cost him more than \$250 — more than he is willing to pay” (Horwitz).

At this point, Jane is frustrated and disappointed. Her actions have clearly been constrained by multiple social structures as she looks to obtain an ID. The problems caused by this inequality are structural in nature, and not just the result of Jane’s individual actions. Sadly, Jane's situation is one that many low-income and minority Americans face as they try to get a government-issued photo ID. Reverend Ben Roberts said that without obstacles, the ID process could take about two weeks, but for many clients, it lasts two to three months. “It mostly has to do with finding the time, energy, and motivation to go to places and be told, ‘No,’ constantly,” he explains (Bradley). Jane’s situation isn’t simply a product of her choices, but rather the complex interactions between her action and the constraints of social structures on them. Unfortunately, many of those in similar situations as Jane become so discouraged and abandon the effort of getting an ID. In the words of Roberts, “They’re trying to do the right thing, and they can’t” (Bradley).

After turning 18, I had to make two trips to the DMV which was located 10 miles away from me. This was because I forgot to bring a form of secondary ID to go along with my form of primary ID and Social Security card. While I was easily able to go home and retrieve my high

school transcript, I realized this privilege is not one that millions in America like Jane have. There appears to be multiple barriers in the form of social structures that making it extremely difficult for low-income and minority groups to acquire an ID. Once analyzing the causes of the lack of government photo IDs among these groups through a structural lens, one may now wonder what we can do to address this important inequality and help people like Jane. I will now go into my potential recommendations to reduce this inequality and explain whether they are justifiable or not.

One promising response to this problem involves waiving fees for forms of identification, eliminating some of the required paperwork, and expanding the list of documents to prove residency. As mentioned earlier in the paper, one of the major obstacles to getting an ID is the high costs of obtaining forms of identification. This has prevented many low-income Americans from getting an ID since they cannot afford one. It can also be one of the possible reasons why citizens earning less than \$35,000 per year are more than twice as likely to lack current government-issued photo identification as those earning more than \$35,000 (Brennan Center for Justice). A handful of cities and states have realized the financial burden associated with getting IDs and have implemented fee waivers for the homeless. States such as California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, and South Carolina currently have fee waivers for the homeless who want to replace their birth certificate and get a state-issued photo ID (Wiltz). Hannah Turner, a social worker at Ministry with Community in Kalamazoo, Michigan believes fee waivers are a step in the right direction to help people attain these IDs. As a member of the Calhoun/Kalamazoo County ID task force, Turner has been able to help make state identification more accessible in her region. Before Kalamazoo's waiver program went into effect, Turner had a budget each month that was used to pay for birth

certificates and other documents for Ministry with Community members seeking ID. Due to this, she was forced to turn people away each month when the funds were gone. Now with the fee waivers, Turner is able to help a lot more people attain IDs. Turner has said, “The waivers have been huge. They allow me to see more people, people who beforehand I had to turn away because I didn’t have enough money to pay for those records” (United Way of the Battle Creek and the Kalamazoo Region).

Additionally, eliminating some of the required paperwork can reduce part of the burden and time involved with acquiring one. The ID process can last two to three months for many homeless people since they do not possess the documentation needed to obtain a photo ID (Bradley). This leads to them having to visit multiple times to a state office. Reducing the amount of time, energy, and motivation to obtain an ID can be significant in increasing their ownership of them in America. Furthermore, the implementation of the Real ID has only created more costs for those looking to get an ID. It has made it significantly harder since you have to prove two types of residency which many people who are affected by this problem do not have. Foundry, a program that helps the homeless obtain IDs, had their rate of checks cashed by the D.C. treasurer drop from about 75 percent to 30 percent, as clients failed to meet the new Real ID requirements (Bradley). Currently, to get a Real ID, only certain documents are acceptable, such as a lease, a W-2 form or a paystub. “For low-income or homeless people who’ve lost their identifying documents, such requirements create an insurmountable barrier,” said Danielle Moise, a staff attorney with Bread for the City, a D.C.-based nonprofit that is working to help the homeless get ID (Wiltz). Expanding the list of documents to meet the requirements to get an ID could make it easier for those getting a photo ID. Nationwide, lawmakers in Hawaii, Massachusetts, Texas, and West Virginia have introduced legislation that would make it easier

for homeless individuals to obtain identification, such as eliminating some of the required paperwork (Wiltz). These states have also allowed the homeless to sign affidavits of their identity to satisfy some of the authentication requirements. Enacting similar policies could be instrumental in increasing ID ownership among minority and low-income groups.

Another policy recommendation would be to fund programs that help those acquire an ID through subsidies and grants. Many programs that help people like the homeless obtain IDs are limited by costs. In 2016, one program called TAP paid more than \$47,500 to the D.C. treasurer and out-of-state agencies, more than double its 2011 totals, and up more than 50 percent from 2012. Their funds currently come from congregation donations and small grants. According to Rebecca Kahlenberg who works as a social services worker for TAP, “We’re tiny potatoes compared to a government organization” (Bradley.) One of the reasons they have seen further costs is due to many government agencies sending clients their way. Instead of guiding people through the process, government agencies refer them to these underfunded and understaffed programs. Subsidies and grants can give these programs the funds they need to operate effectively and efficiently. In addition, we also ought to have private efforts to help people obtain IDs. While ideally these programs will be government funded, the second-best option is to fund these organizations that we already have through private donations. Overall, both government and private efforts can help lower the costs associated with acquiring IDs and increase the quantity of ID ownership.

A third recommendation concerns issuing ID’s in more geographically accessible ways and increasing coordination among city offices. Due to the long time and travel costs associated with going to the DMV to get a photo ID, a potential solution would be to have mobile units, schools, libraries, or post offices be places that can issue IDs. This solution would be similar to

how one could currently get a passport at a post office or library that is a designated passport acceptance facility. Additionally, greater coordination among city offices can reduce the time and travel costs for those needing to get an ID. Instead of traveling to multiple different places such as the DMV, the vital records office, and doctor's office to get needed identification documents, it would be easier for someone to only need to go to one location. Virginia is one example of a State who includes birth certificate services at its DMV locations. This can lower the time it takes to get an ID and hopefully reduce the number of times someone may need to go to a state office.

No solution is without its problems. The drawbacks of these policy recommendations include the possibility of an increase in voter fraud, security concerns, and higher taxation or reduced government spending in other sectors. Many Americans justify strict voter ID laws with the fact that they are needed to stop illegal voting. In a poll conducted by Fox News under the joint direction of Anderson Robbins Research (D) and Shaw & Company (R), 70 percent of Americans say voter ID laws are needed to stop illegal voting (Blanton). This shows the social anxiety that Americans have in regard to lowering the barriers for one to obtain an ID. However, a study from Enrico Cantoni at the University of Bologna and Vincent Pons at Harvard Business School, found that voter ID laws don't have a detectable effect on voter fraud — which is extremely rare in the US, anyway (Lopez). Using two databases tracking voter fraud reported by the media and elsewhere, they found no correlation between voter fraud and stricter voter ID laws. Furthermore, Loyola Law School professor Justin Levitt who studied voter impersonation found that there were 35 total credible accusations out of 800 million ballots cast between 2000 and 2014 in primary, municipal, special, and other elections (Lopez). Another reason for the strict requirements to acquire an ID are security concerns. Tighter restrictions have their origins

in the 2005 REAL ID Act, authored by Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (R-Wis.). Congress passed the legislation in response to security concerns after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (Bradley). While anxieties related to national security are understandable, I argue that allowing homeless people to find employment and receive food assistance far outweigh the benefits that stricter ID laws could bring by preventing terrorism. Additionally, one may argue that some may potentially exploit these reduced ID requirements and get social services benefits without proper identification through this recommendation. Although this is certainly a possibility, I believe that the burden of those who currently qualify but are unable to get things like SNAP, a job, and vote far outweigh the burden of those covering these additional costs. The current alternative where people are not able to vote and work due to not having an ID seems to be far more unjust than a situation where lowering the barriers to getting an ID leads to greater fraud. Furthermore, stricter ID laws can only do so much, and it is very possible that terrorists could find other ways to acquire fake forms of identification.

Given the dangers to which Real ID responds to, I also think it is worth considering a potential policy where things like social service applications and voting require another form of ID that is easier to acquire. While I do think Real ID requirements are necessary and have many benefits when it comes to things like border crossing and plane travel, I do not believe that it is necessary for one to have a Real ID to be able to get a job or apply for food assistance. Instead, an alternative form of ID that is easier to get can be a solution that helps those who currently have their basic capabilities thwarted by not having a government photo ID.

Another downside to this policy recommendation is that it could result in higher taxation or reduced government spending in other sectors. The funding for these policies and programs, in all likelihood, will come from higher taxes, especially for wealthy individuals. This is, of course,

unfavorable to those whose taxes would increase. That is a real inconvenience to taxpayers, and that burden should not be diminished. Yet, this burden pales in comparison to the burdens experienced by those not able to get a state issued photo ID and other ID documents. The policy recommendations I propose appear to be a nominal cost. This is since there will be a one-time fee that taxpayers will bear in order to help people get these identification documents. In comparison, a program such as SNAP pays monthly allotments to individuals who are eligible and costed the government around \$111 billion in 2021. Additionally, only a certain amount of people in need will qualify for these fee waivers and reduced administration barriers when getting an ID. When considering these facts, it appears that the burden on the taxpayer is insubstantial when comparing it to the burden of those who are harmed by not having an ID. Without these documents, people can't apply for jobs or services related to basic needs, finances, employment, and education. As discussed earlier, there is clear violation of multiple capabilities as those without an ID are unable to realize their full potential and live a decent human life. Unfortunately, there is a loss of autonomy, wellbeing, emotional/intellectual thriving, and dignity faced by those who lack forms of identification. Moreover, people who do not have an ID are much more unlikely to be able to vote. This is a notable harm as these groups have had their social dignity violated. Those without an ID have not been able to have a say and participate in political choices that affect their lives. When you compare the two's burdens, we can see that although higher taxes are understandably objectionable by the wealthy, no one can reasonably say that we should prioritize a marginal loss of wealth over the life and health of those without an ID. Therefore, from a contractualist standpoint, the taxpayer could not reasonably reject the policy of waiving fees for IDs and funding programs that help people obtain them.

Furthermore, it's not as though the taxpayers will only suffer and have no benefit at all. There are many long-term social benefits that come with increasing the ownership of IDs. I believe that increasing the ability of the homeless to find employment, access social benefits to reduce homelessness, and participate in the democratic process outweighs the costs that come with these policies. As I discussed previously, obtaining IDs can help people obtain jobs and social benefits that can potentially lift people out of poverty. There are many benefits to a world where poverty is less prevalent. The monetary burden on taxpayers who pay for government programs such as SNAP could potentially be reduced if there are less people in situations of poverty. Moreover, there seems to be a clear demand and need for IDs. According to Danielle Moise, a staff attorney with Bread for the City, a D.C.-based nonprofit that is working to help the homeless get ID, "Our social workers tell me, however, that although the numbers have declined, IDs still seem to be the second-most- requested service, after requests for affordable housing" (Wiltz).

There are millions of Americans like Tony Simmons that become trapped in poverty as they struggle to function in society without an ID. Not having an ID makes it exponentially harder for one to find employment or access social services, two things that could help low-income people escape the cycle of poverty. It also acts as a barrier for one to vote and participate in the democratic process. This problem is not uncommon as across the country more than one in ten Americans do not have government issued photo identification cards. Unfortunately, those most likely to be affected by this inequality are historically marginalized and low-income groups. The harm caused by these race and class inequalities appear to be unjust once looking at the significant burdens faced by those without an ID and comparing them to the burdens of other parties involved. Through this lens, it becomes difficult to object to the current social structures

that make it exceptionally difficult for these groups to get an ID. These clear inequalities now become inequities or unjust inequalities, and I believe we must therefore do everything we can to remove barriers that these groups encounter when seeking state-issued identification. Everyone should easily be able to get a photo ID if they want to. A photo ID is more than just a piece of plastic. It can play an important role in restoring the dignity of the oppressed. In the words of Brent Downs, a formerly homeless man who now serves on the board of directors of the Phoenix-based Homeless ID Project, “[when] you’re experiencing homelessness, you get used to being invisible. And now you don’t even have a piece of ID that says who you are” (Wiltz).

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