

# Why Limiting Acceptance of a Driver's License as Identification Will Harm Public Safety

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SOME STATES PROPOSE TO LIMIT the acceptability of certain driver's licenses as identification. Doing so will harm public safety, interfere with law enforcement, and harm communities and their members.

- When police officers can use a driver's license to establish an individual's identity, their safety and ability to enforce the law are enhanced, and they can employ their limited resources more efficiently.
- A driver's license database that does not fully identify the identity of license-holders is less useful for law enforcement and national security purposes.
- People who have identification documents that will be accepted are more willing to interact with the police as witnesses or victims of crime and are less likely to be victims of crime because they can open bank accounts using their government-issued identification.

Here's what the experts say:

## Accepting driver's licenses as identification helps law enforcement officers

— *The Police Chief* magazine

"Every day, in jurisdictions throughout the United States and around the world, law enforcement officers are confronted with a common and compelling question: 'Who is the person with whom I am dealing?' When a law enforcement officer initiates a routine traffic stop or answers a call for service—things that occur thousands of times each and every day—one of the officer's first objectives is to establish the identity of the person or persons with whom they are dealing.

"Establishing identity is important because it enables the officer to determine whether the person, if operating a motor vehicle, has a valid and appropriate driver's license; whether the person poses an immediate threat to the officer or to others; and whether the person is wanted in this or another jurisdiction. Additionally, it enables the officer to determine whether there are any restrictions on the driver's license of that person and whether the subject has a criminal record that may have relevance to the current situation (for example, whether the person is on probation with a curfew or geographic restrictions or other conditions). [Footnote omitted.]

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“If the person has a driver’s license or another photo-based state identification card, the officer can compare the photo and demographic factors with the appearance of the person and normally make a reasonably accurate determination of the likelihood that the person is in fact who he or she claims to be. If the person does not have a valid driver’s license or another photo-based state identification card, however, the officer may not be able to immediately and accurately determine an identity. A wanted person may elude apprehension if the officer is unable to complete identification in the field.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Police can use their resources more efficiently if driver’s licenses are acceptable as identification**

— Art Venegas, founder of the Law Enforcement Engagement Initiative and former police chief of Sacramento, California

“The question [of immigrants having acceptable identification documents] is an economic one for police, because every time we stop someone who has no identification, it takes a lot of manpower to identify that person. An officer will spend up to two or three hours to determine who an arrestee is.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Driver’s license databases are a law enforcement tool**

— Bruce Schneir, security expert

“The state driver’s license databases are the only comprehensive databases of U.S. residents. They’re more complete, and contain more information—including photographs and, in some cases, fingerprints—than the IRS database, the Social Security database, or state birth certificate databases. As such, they are an invaluable police tool—for investigating crimes, tracking down suspects, and proving guilt.”<sup>3</sup>

— Margaret D. Stock, national security expert

“The collective DMV databases are the largest law enforcement databases in the country, with records on more individual adults than any other law enforcement databases. The collective DMV databases are the only comprehensive internal security database. . . .

“When a person appears at the state DMV and applies for a driver license, that person voluntarily provides the DMV with a variety of valuable personal information—including a key identifier, the digital photo. DMV databases thus contain biometric information, and a

<sup>1</sup> David J. Roberts, “Verifying and Establishing Identity: A Priority in Public Safety Operations,” Technology Talk, *The Police Chief* (Nov. 2011), [www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display\\_arch&article\\_id=2537&issue\\_id=112011](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=2537&issue_id=112011).

<sup>2</sup> *Voices from Across the Country: Local Law Enforcement Officials Discuss the Challenges of Immigration Enforcement* (Police Executive Research Forum, 2012), [www.policeforum.org/library/immigration/VoicesfromAcrossTheCountryonImmigrationEnforcement.pdf](http://www.policeforum.org/library/immigration/VoicesfromAcrossTheCountryonImmigrationEnforcement.pdf), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Schneier, “Giving Drivers Licenses to Illegal Immigrants,” *Schneier on Security*, Feb. 13, 2008, [www.schneier.com/blog/archives/2008/02/giving\\_drivers.html](http://www.schneier.com/blog/archives/2008/02/giving_drivers.html).

wealth of other valuable information that is updated on a regular basis, voluntarily by the individual who has the license.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Ability to prove identity improves the relationship between community members and the police**

— *New Haven Independent* newspaper

“The sense of belonging has also improved relations between cops and immigrants. It has helped prevent immigrants from being victimized because of a fear of reporting crimes due to a lack of ID, cops said. . . .

“Residents felt they have a stake in the community,’ [Assistant Police Chief Luiz] Casanova said. ‘We still reap the benefits.’ People are less intimidated to talk to police. Traffic stops became more efficient because ‘we were able to ID people pretty quickly.’”<sup>5</sup>

### **When people can identify themselves with government-issued IDs, they can open bank accounts, which reduces the risk that they will be targeted by criminals**

— Report by the Police Executive Research Forum

“[T]he lack of acceptable identification hindered efforts by undocumented immigrants to open bank accounts, leaving them vulnerable to robbery. Often referred to as ‘walking ATMs’ because they were known to carry cash, immigrants were easy targets for robbers who knew that the crime would not likely . . . be reported to the police.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret D. Stock, “Driver Licenses and National Security: Myths and Reality,” 10 *Bender’s Immigration Bulletin*, Mar. 1, 2005, <http://w3.lexisnexis.com/practiceareas/immigration/pdfs/web785a.pdf>, p. 422.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas MacMillan, “Elm City ID Card Turns 5,” *New Haven Independent*, July 23, 2012, [www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/id\\_card\\_anniversary/](http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/id_card_anniversary/).

<sup>6</sup> Debra A. Hoffmaster, Gerard Murphy, Shannon McFadden, and Molly Griswold, *Police and Immigration: How Chiefs are Leading Their Communities through the Challenges* (Police Executive Research Forum, 2010), [www.policeforum.org/library/immigration/PERFImmigrationReportMarch2011.pdf](http://www.policeforum.org/library/immigration/PERFImmigrationReportMarch2011.pdf), p. 5.