
Statement from the John Howard Association about the Importance of State ID cards for People Impacted by the Criminal Legal System

**Announcement of State ID program for people leaving the Cook County Jail by Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias and Sheriff Tom Dart
December 11, 2023**

The John Howard Association is an independent prison watch dog organization in Illinois that monitors prisons and advances independent oversight of carceral systems to promote humane treatment and increased transparency. We use our on-the-ground, first hand observations and what we learn from the people who live and work inside our facilities to identify problems and advance solutions. Centered in our work is understanding the need for equity and harm reduction, as well as the need to respect the dignity and rights of every human being.

JHA is keenly aware of the challenges and injustices entrenched in our prison and jail systems, as well as the difficulties people face when they walk out of institutional doors to reenter society. Most people leave jail and prison worse off than when they arrived, which hurts everyone: the individuals, their families, and all of our communities.

One way in which we can give people a better chance of success is by making sure that they have a state ID card. JHA has long promoted policies that provide free state ID cards for system impacted people; a state ID is a vital tool, for it is critical to civic engagement and social enfranchisement. A state ID is needed to apply for housing, a job, or government benefits; to participate in educational programming; and so much more. The barriers to obtaining a state ID are myriad: difficulty obtaining birth certificates and social security cards, the fees that are included, as well as the long travel times and transportation costs involved in getting to all of these offices and the DMV.

Many people now leave prison in Illinois with a state ID in hand – we are thrilled that the Illinois Department of Corrections and the Secretary of State’s office implemented this program, and we look forward to its continued expansion. The program announced today by Secretary of State Giannoulias and Sheriff Dart is an important advancement - we commend them for creating a program that will get more state IDs into the hands of people who need this assistance in order to move forward productively. Helping more people impacted by the criminal legal system get state IDs is one way we can begin to reduce reintegration hurdles and improve outcomes for people leaving custody. A commitment to helping people impacted by the criminal legal system be successful is an investment in our most precious resource in Illinois, our citizens. Making it possible for every man and woman in or leaving custody to get an ID card is smart policy and a wise investment.