

## Why GAO Did This Study

Nearly 550,000 people were released from federal and state prisons in 2020. These people may face challenges reentering society—such as obtaining housing and employment—that may require ID documents to address. BOP, which is responsible for about 140,000 federally incarcerated people, is required to help these people obtain ID documents before release.

GAO was asked to report on BOP's processes to help incarcerated people obtain ID documents, and the number of those people. This report addresses (1) BOP's process to assist people, (2) the extent to which people are released from BOP facilities with ID documents, and (3) selected states' processes for assisting people.

GAO reviewed legislation and BOP and state policies and analyzed BOP data related to its efforts to assist people in obtaining ID documents. GAO also conducted non-generalizable interviews with officials from five BOP facilities and other offices, selected based on location and facility security levels, and eight formerly incarcerated people, selected by working with an advocacy organization. GAO also interviewed agency officials from a non-generalizable sample of six states that were selected based, in part, on their use of a variety of approaches.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations, including that BOP leverage stakeholder input in developing a new ID card and take various steps to enhance its data collection and analysis efforts to better assist incarcerated people. BOP concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105302](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or [Goodwin@gao.gov](mailto:Goodwin@gao.gov).

# BUREAU OF PRISONS

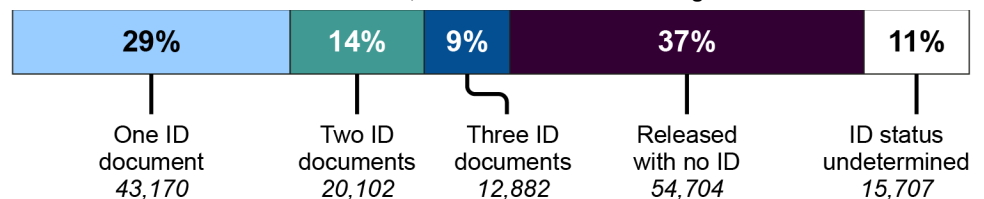
## Opportunities Exist to Better Assist Incarcerated People with Obtaining ID Documents Prior to Release

### What GAO Found

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has a process to assist federally incarcerated people with obtaining identification (ID) documents before their release. These include Social Security cards, birth certificates, and state-issued photo IDs (e.g. a driver's license). However, BOP officials noted that there are a number of inherent challenges in assisting people with getting IDs. For example, people may not be able to pay fees for an ID document, or may not be interested in obtaining them. BOP officials stated that the agency is developing a new federal ID card for incarcerated people, which they may be able to exchange for a state-issued photo ID upon release. While BOP has begun outreach to state motor vehicle departments about this new ID card, it has not identified or leveraged input from other stakeholders, such as public assistance providers or state health agencies, which could potentially accept the new ID card. By doing so, BOP could be better positioned to maximize people's use of the ID card.

BOP data show that about half the people released from 2018 through 2021 had at least one ID document in their possession when they left the BOP facility, which exceeds BOP's stated goal of 45 percent. Of those people released with ID documents, most had one ID, as shown below. Of the three ID documents, BOP released the highest percentage of people with Social Security cards.

**Percentage and Number of People Released from Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Facilities with ID Documents in Their Possession, Calendar Years 2018 through 2021**



Source: GAO analysis of BOP data. | [GAO-23-105302](#)

BOP does not collect complete or consistent data on people's ID document status. For example, though its data system includes a data field to record the ID documents that a person possesses, it does not require all staff to consistently use this data field. BOP also has not assessed if it could collect better data and does not analyze data it does collect. Without requiring the collection of complete and consistent data, or analyzing such data, BOP may lack full information of the people in their custody who do not have ID documents or why they lack these documents. Having this greater understanding could allow BOP to better target its efforts in ID document assistance, thus providing more people with a chance at successful reentry.

The selected states—Colorado, Florida, Ohio, Minnesota, Montana and Virginia—used various approaches to assist incarcerated people in their states' prisons with obtaining ID documents. For example, some states provide mobile licensing services, have a motor vehicle office embedded at a correctional facility or have correctional staff trained to process photo IDs, or issue an ID at the correctional facility that people can exchange for a state-issued photo ID.