

MYTH: Incarcerated individuals cannot get a replacement Social Security card unless they have a current drivers' license or United States passport.

FACT: The Social Security Administration can issue a replacement card for many inmates nearing release even if they do not have a current drivers' license or U.S. passport.

By law, the Social Security Administration (SSA) must see documents to prove the identity of every applicant for a replacement Social Security card. Individuals who have been incarcerated for an extended period may not have the documents needed to prove identity, such as a current drivers' license or passport.

To help soon-to-be released persons obtain a replacement Social Security card, many institutions agree to perform an investigation to prove each incarcerated person's identity at the time they enter into custody.

The institution may prove a person's identity by reviewing documents in their file; reviewing records from other law enforcement entities; examining birth records, school transcripts, employment records, conferring with family members; and comparing the individual's physical characteristics against the physical description found in National Crime Information Center records.

Once the investigation is complete and documented, individuals confined in an institution that has an agreement with Social Security may file an application for a Social Security card as they near their anticipated release date.

Because the institution has established the individual's identity, Social Security accepts written certification from an official of the institution in lieu of documents usually required when a person applies for a card at a Social Security office. This process ensures that the individual has a Social Security card in-hand when they are released.

Correctional institutions should contact the local Social Security office to learn how to enter into an agreement with Social Security to help soon-to-be released individuals obtain replacement cards.

For More Information:

Social Security Administration Website:
<http://www.ssa.gov/>

Social Security Administration Reentry Website:
<https://www.ssa.gov/reentry/>

Find your local Social Security office:
<https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>

What is a REENTRY MYTH BUSTER?

This Myth Buster is one in a series of fact sheets intended to clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Each year, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons. Another 11.4 million cycle through local jails. When reentry fails, the social and economic costs are high -- more crime, more victims, more family distress, and more pressure on already-strained state and municipal budgets.

Because reentry intersects with health and housing, education and employment, family, faith, and community well-being, many federal agencies are focusing on initiatives for the reentry population. Under the auspices of the Cabinet-level interagency Reentry Council, federal agencies are working together to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

For more information about the Reentry Council, go to: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/>