

# Grumet: How do you get ID without ID? San Marcos offers a path with other paperwork



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SAN MARCOS — From a small red meeting room behind the nonfiction stacks, the San Marcos Public Library is tackling one of the thorniest Catch-22's in government:

How do you get a photo ID if you don't already have a photo ID?

This is not a mere brainteaser for people like Suzanne Duggins, whose expired Arkansas driver's license was stolen earlier this year, or for Omar LeRoi King II, who has been unable to get a proper ID for years because of a maddening error on his birth certificate.

I met both of them this week as they brought thick folders of personal papers to the San Marcos library, to the red meeting room where new library cards are minted. Each one left with a new “enhanced” library card, complete with their picture, home address and date of birth.

A photo ID issued by a government agency.

“This helps a lot,” King told me, holding his new ID card, still warm from the printer. “Literally anything an adult can do, I haven’t been able to do” because of a lack of ID.

The San Marcos Public Library is among the first in the state to make photo ID library cards available, and I hope Austin and other communities are paying attention.

(Austin briefly considered its own ID program in 2014, but members of the new 10-1 City Council did not see it as a priority during their first budget season.)



The champions of the San Marcos program believe the enhanced library card can be a lifeline for some in need. I’m rooting for that. But the success of the program will

hinge on whether other organizations accept the library ID as a vetted, verifiable document.

I know what you're thinking. But no, you can't use a library card, even with a photo, to vote in Texas. Nor can you use it to buy beer. Supporters hope the enhanced library card, presented with other documents, can help people establish their identity in other situations, such as applying for jobs or rental assistance.

"We can't guarantee another place will accept it," the library's public services manager, Samantha Gordano, told me Monday afternoon. "But we're giving them another form of ID to help bridge the gap."

## **This will be 'life-altering'**

Mano Amiga, a nonprofit providing resources to the immigrant community in San Marcos, asked the library to offer these cards. The group even says it provided about \$5,300 for the library to get the equipment, including a special printer and software, to make the photo IDs.

Lack of ID "makes it even more difficult for (immigrants) to have access to resources such as housing, utilities or even being able to pick up their kids from school," Nataly Avendano, immigration coordinator with Mano Amiga, said at a press conference last week.

I hadn't even thought about that until she'd said it, but yes, you have to show a photo ID at the front desk just to pick up your kid early from school. Where does that leave parents without IDs?

Advocates say the card could also help those who are homeless. During San Marcos' 2019 Point in Time count, a one-day field survey of those who are homeless, "one of the things that we saw most frequently was the need for IDs," Hannah Durrance, president of the HOME Center of Central Texas, said at the press conference. "The fact that our library is now going to be making that available is going to be life-altering for some of these individuals."

An ID means people can apply for social services. An ID means, if they can scrape together enough money, they can get a hotel room on a frigid night.

## How do you get carded?

Typically you have to show a state-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, to get a library card.

But the San Marcos library offers a generous alternative path: Provide some other document bearing your photo, such as a gym club card, school ID, inmate identification card or Mexican matrícula consular card. Then provide two other documents with your name and address, such as a utility bill, pay stub or medical record.

San Marcos didn't reinvent the wheel here. The San Antonio Public Library launched a similar program this year, providing a model for how a library can verify a person's identity with a broader pool of documents than the driver's license office accepts.

Duggins was able to find a photocopy of her expired (and now stolen) Arkansas license. That, paired with her Social Security paperwork and a letter from AAA, verified her identity.

King brought a copy of his recent high school transcript, which included a tiny but clear picture of him. He also presented his paycheck stubs and a civil court document from his efforts to legally establish his proper name. As a result of a paperwork mishap at the military hospital where King was born, his birth certificate identified him only as an "Infant" bearing his mother's maiden name, creating a bureaucratic knot he's been working for years to untangle.

Duggins hopes she can use the card to make an appointment with a new doctor. King hopes to open a bank account, among other things. Both viewed the library card as a helpful tool for other tasks while they continue the more labor-intensive process of getting state-issued IDs.

Getting a driver's license is easy if you have the right documents, such as your birth certificate and a utility bill, in a drawer at home. But not everyone does. And often the people who write the rules don't have the lived experience of people like Duggins or King. They don't realize what kinds of roadblocks can appear.

That's what makes the San Marcos library's experiment worth watching: It aims to provide an ID that means something, using the kinds of documents people actually have.

"Aw, that's cool," Duggins said as the librarian gave her something she hadn't had for nearly a year, a photo ID. "I just want to hug you."

*Grumet is the Statesman's Metro columnist. Her column, ATX in Context, contains her opinions. Share yours via email at [bgrumet@statesman.com](mailto:bgrumet@statesman.com) or via Twitter at [@bgrumet](https://twitter.com/bgrumet).*

## **Get your ID**

The San Marcos Public Library offers [free library cards](#), with or without a photo, to any resident of Hays County who provides proper documentation. Appointments are required for an enhanced (photo ID) library card. Call (512) 393-8200.