Over 15,000 Milwaukee County teens ages 16-17 lack a driver’s license or instruction permit – even though the license is a critical asset for employment.

Wisconsin driver’s license records from the Department of Transportation were used to identify employment barriers faced by lower-income residents of Milwaukee County and particularly for African American and Hispanic teens in Milwaukee.

Over 12,000 Milwaukee Teens (Ages 16-17) and 3,000 Suburban Teens Lack a Driver’s License or Learner’s Permit (as of January 2012)

The driver’s license, while an essential asset for employment for most workers, is increasingly expensive to obtain for lower-income youth. The State of Wisconsin has discontinued state aids for driver’s education while requiring that school age youth participate in a school or commercial driving program as a condition for obtaining their license.

- As of January 2012, only 17% of African American male teens (ages 16-17) in the city of Milwaukee had a driver’s license, including 9% with an instruction permit and 8% with a probationary license. Only 22% of African American females (ages 16-17) were licensed.

- By contrast 64% of white male teens (ages 16-17) living in the suburbs of the county had a license, including 17% with a learner’s permit and 47% who already had their probationary license. The highest rate of licensing was noted for suburban white female teens (ages 16-17) where 70% were licensed, including 19% with an instruction permit and 51% with a probationary license.

- Both male and female Hispanic teens (ages 16-17) in Milwaukee had low licensing rates with only 17% of males and 19% of females licensed.

Paying for a driving course, maintaining a working vehicle, and securing insurance coverage for teenagers (particularly in inner city zipcodes where insurance rates are highest) is a costly undertaking for many financially strapped families. Unfortunately, thousands of Milwaukee teens drive even though they have not taken driver’s education, do not have a license, and cannot afford auto insurance. See [www.eti.uwm.edu](http://www.eti.uwm.edu) for more driver license research.