



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER
TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE OF IMMIGRATION ON
THE CREATION OF A NYC IDENTITY CARD PROGRAM
APRIL 30, 2014

Thank you, Chair Menchaca, for the opportunity to testify today regarding City Council's proposal to create a New York City identity card program.

Many immigrants come to New York City because it is a place of opportunities. However, some of the City's most basic services and opportunities are becoming increasingly difficult to access, not only for immigrants, but for the vulnerable populations among our midst who do not have documents that can readily prove their identity and residency. As a result, everyday necessities are being reduced to privileges granted only to those who have proper IDs. These can include opening and maintaining a bank account, accessing City services and benefits, signing a lease, traveling in and out of New York City, and picking up packages from the post office.

I support the Council's effort to create municipal IDs as a way to remove barriers for all New Yorkers—not only immigrants, but also other constituent groups that are often overlooked in the conversation. They include those who do not have stable mailing addresses such as the homeless and foster youths; individuals such as older adults who rely on fixed incomes and may not be able to afford the \$105-200 plus additional fees for a passport or \$80 for a driver's license; and people with mental health issues, disabilities and conviction records who already face hurdles to accessing City resources and services.

The municipal ID card has the potential to benefit a wide spectrum of New Yorkers who fit into one or more underserved groups including the over 500,000 who are undocumented, over 30,000 homeless adults, over 800,000 without a bank or credit union account, and just under 1 million seniors, about half of whom are foreign-born.¹

Creating a municipal ID will help the vulnerable throughout the City to engage in all areas of life as New Yorkers. To this end, New York City's municipal ID program must be developed and implemented in a thoughtful way that avoids the many pitfalls other cities already using municipal IDs have encountered. I submit the following recommendations to City Council and the Mayor's Office of Operations:

¹ Sources: 2010 U.S. Census, NYC Department of Planning, NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, and Center for An Urban Future.

- **Municipal IDs must not become the *de facto* form of identification for the undocumented.** The intent behind the ID is not to single out and stigmatize a subgroup of New Yorkers. To prevent this, City Council and the Mayor’s Office of Operations must ensure municipal IDs are useful for all New Yorkers. Many other cities have undertaken this effort with success: San Francisco’s ID card serves as an acceptable form of identification for opening checking accounts, offers discounts on tourist attractions, and can be used as a library card. Oakland’s ID card doubles as a debit card. Los Angeles is looking into linking its ID card with the local transit system. Closer to home, the ID card in New Jersey’s Mercer County is recognized by “law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, the board of social services, courts, recreational locations, libraries, and retail establishments,” according to a report by the Center for Popular Democracy.
- **Municipal IDs will not have their intended effect without NYPD support.** I am pleased that the proposed legislation requires “all city agencies [to] accept [the municipal ID] as proof of identity and residency,” which will include the NYPD and the DOE. The onus for making NYC’s municipal ID acceptable to law enforcement agencies will in part fall on the Mayor’s Office of Operations to ensure the ID is fraud-resistant and contains multiple layers of protection such as watermark, magnetic stripe, and holograms. I look forward to this added resource that will reduce the number of New Yorkers being detained for lack of proper ID.
- **Municipal IDs must not be too costly to obtain.** Municipal IDs must be affordable to New Yorkers. City Council and the Mayor’s Office of Operations should consider a tiered fee schedule. In Oakland, seniors receive a \$5 discount from the card’s regular cost of \$15; in Richmond, CA, ID cards are \$15 for the general public but \$10 for the low-income population.² I believe implementing a similar sliding scale of fees will encourage broad adoption of New York City’s municipal ID cards.
- **Municipal IDs must not be difficult to obtain.** I applaud City Council for including language assistance as a requirement under Intro 253. When the initiative reaches its implementation stage, I urge the Mayor’s Office of Operations to make language access widely available to assist those with Limited English Proficiency. The city has many community-based organizations that serve New York City’s diverse immigrant populations. Engaging these groups for outreach and education will ensure those who can most benefit from municipal IDs will know how to obtain one.

In closing, I want to voice my support for the creation of New York City Municipal ID Cards. It is an important effort that is worth doing well. Many cities in the country and around the world have already taken steps to turn ID cards into a safe, widely accepted and widely used multiservice tool. I ask City Council and the Mayor’s Office to create the same resource for all New Yorkers.

² Center for Popular Democracy, *Who We Are: Municipal ID card as a strategy to promote belonging and shared community identity*.