

Finally, an ID program that builds community

Written by Misty Rebik Guest Opinion

Feb. 21, 2014 |

press-citizen.com

It's good news that our community is seeking to join other cities and counties across the country that have established community ID cards for their residents.

Too often, we hear about ID programs that exclude people from services; this program would have the opposite effect. It would:

- Give all residents the right to be identified as proud members of this community.
- Give our neighbors who currently lack official, locally recognized IDs the opportunity to participate more fully in our economy, interact with police and prevent discrimination.
- Promote a safer, more inclusive community for us all.

Every day at the Center for Worker Justice, we meet people who face serious barriers because they lack an official, locally recognized ID. We know people who have to go to payday loan lenders or carry their money in cash because banks require an ID to open accounts. We know people who were forced to leave their purchases at the grocery counter because they didn't have a government ID to show that their debit card was truly theirs, and we know people who have been refused decent housing because they couldn't provide a government-issued ID.

Who doesn't have official IDs? It's a broader group than you may think. Some are immigrants without documents, as well as those with documents who don't yet have their green card or drivers' license. Some are seniors who no longer drive and don't have their birth certificate or other documents required for a state-issued ID. Some are homeless, or have moved frequently, and lost their identification documents. Some are victims of domestic violence, or natural disasters, who were displaced suddenly from their homes.

The community ID report available on the Iowa City website provides an excellent analysis of the legality and feasibility of this program, along with a review of other communities' experience. Based on our review of the report and discussions with our low-wage and immigrant members, we believe an effective ID program should meet the following criteria:

- Issued by local government and recognized by county and city law enforcement.
- Can be used to access public facilities and services, such as libraries, recreation center programs, and visitors' hours at the county jail.
- Includes an education and outreach plan to encourage local banks and retailers to accept the ID.
- Secure and accessible. Requires enough proof of identity and residency to protect the integrity of the program, without being too restrictive.
- Protects the cardholder's information.

- Must promote access, not create new barriers. CWJ opposes efforts to require IDs in local schools or recreation facilities.

We believe this program will directly improve the lives of thousands of members of our community who lack locally recognized IDs and create a safer, more inclusive community for all its residents.

Misty Rebik is executive director for the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa.