

Potential benefits of a community ID

The Gazette Opinion Staff

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The Gazette Editorial Board

Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa and others are proposing a community ID program for Iowa City and Johnson County. It's the first Midwest location to seriously discuss implementation. The aim is to help a substantial number of people who cannot access basic services without an ID, one that would be recognized by local law enforcement, public agencies and businesses.

We think the idea has merit.

A primary target group is immigrants, including undocumented people who are working locally but face difficulties in conducting everyday business and often are hesitant to contact legal authorities about possible criminal actions they have endured. Others it could assist include seniors who no longer can drive and don't have a driver's license and victims of natural disasters and domestic abuse.

Backers say more people with an ID would be a boost to local economic activity. And for working undocumented immigrants, another benefit for them and society could be more complete crime reporting. With a community ID, they would be less fearful of stepping forward to report criminal activity based on what's happened in a handful of other cities around the nation where such a program has been in place.

Details on this proposal still are being worked out. It's likely that the ID would be free or have a low fee. There would be some modest cost to local government.

For those who question that taxpayer cost, keep in mind that undocumented workers already pay local and state taxes. In 2010, that tax revenue amounted to about \$64 million statewide, according to the nonpartisan Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. Nationally, it was \$10.6 billion. The research group also estimates that if federal immigration reform allowed undocumented people without criminal records to work here legally, that amount would increase at least \$2 billion a year, including \$18 million more in Iowa.

Questions about this proposal remain but in lieu of long-stalled federal reforms, we think the idea could be beneficial to the community. Johnson County could be a test model for Iowa.

Read more: <http://thegazette.com/2014/03/18/potential-benefits-of-a-community-id/#ixzz2yPO14DQb>