

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2017

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Coalition of 15 Organizations Serving Wyandotte County Urge County Commissioners to Establish Municipal Photo I.D. Program

OVERLAND PARK, KS --- Today, a coalition of 15 organizations serving residents of Wyandotte County sent a letter to the Commissioners of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas urging them to establish a municipal photo identification card program.

Municipal I.D. is a form of photo identification issued by a city or county government as a way to prove a person's identity or to allow an individual access to services from any institution that agrees to accept the card as proof of identity. The establishment of a municipal I.D. card program in Wyandotte County would make the community an even safer and more welcoming place for its diverse residents to call home. Having government-issued photo I.D. confers a sense of dignity, access to vital resources, and strengthens community safety, yet nearly 1 out of 5 Wyandotte County residents, or 30,000 people, belong to demographic groups that struggle to obtain a driver's license or non-driver's identification card due to the inaccessibility of their birth certificate or other necessary documentation.

Nationwide, 7% of U.S. citizens do not have ready access to citizenship documents. For adults earning less than \$25,000 per year, the rate climbs to 12%. The disparity is even higher in communities of color: 25% of African-American adults have no current government-issued identification card. Additional demographic groups who frequently struggle to secure photo I.D. are the elderly, immigrants, the homeless population, transgender individuals, reentering citizens, and foster youth.

The coalition calling for the establishment of a municipal I.D. program works closely with Wyandotte County's diverse populations and witnesses first-hand the significant obstacles that people without a government-issued I.D. face every day. Among these challenges are opening a bank account, seeing a doctor, picking up a package from the post office, and accessing community services. These challenges prevent individuals without a photo I.D. from participating fully in the community and contributing to the local economy. In recognition of these challenges, the boards of Unified School District 500 and the Kansas City, Kansas Community College previously voted to support a municipal ID program in Wyandotte County.

In addition to empowering Wyandotte County residents to better engage in the community, a municipal I.D. card program would strengthen community safety. Individuals who lack

identification are often more hesitant to interact with law enforcement, which makes them less likely to report a crime or solicit the aid of a local police officer. When populations who experience marginalization from mainstream society feel safe and welcome in their communities, they are more likely to fully cooperate with law enforcement, resulting in a safer and more stable environment for everyone.

Cities and counties across the country have already introduced municipal I.D. programs with great success. For example, in New York City, over 730,000 people applied for an I.D. within the first year of the program. Other cities have reported a reduction in crime and an increase in the reporting of crime since the implementation of an I.D. program.

Polling data shows that there exists a strong desire for a municipal I.D. program among the residents of Wyandotte County. In a poll conducted by coalition members in early September, 62% of respondents said they believe the Wyandotte County government should do more to make the community a safe and welcoming place for all people, including immigrants. Sixty-two percent also consider eliminating obstacles for those who cannot obtain government issued identification to be an important issue facing their community. A clear majority of respondents indicated support for the establishment of a municipal I.D. program.

Now is the time for Wyandotte County to take concrete steps to create a safer and more welcoming home for all of its residents. The coalition urges the Wyandotte County Commissioners to enhance the county's culture of safety, dignity and security for all residents through the establishment of a municipal I.D. program.

Signatories of the letter to the Wyandotte County Commissioners

Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation

American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas

American Immigration Lawyers Association, Kansas/Missouri Chapter

Cross Border Network

Cross-Lines Community Outreach

El Centro, Inc.

Immigrant Justice Advocacy Movement

Kansas Appleseed

Kansas Forward Together

Kansas Missouri Dream Alliance

MainStream Coalition

reStart, Inc.

Sister Therese Bangert

Stand Up KC

Sunflower House

The letter to the Commissioners of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County can be found here:

This press release can be found online here:

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