

August 9, 2018

Mayor David Alvey
Mayor/CEO
Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas
701 North 7th Street, Suite 926
Kansas City, KS 66101

Dear Mayor Alvey:

As Wyandotte County residents and community members, we write today to request that the Unified Government establish a municipal photo identification card program. Doing so would ensure that Wyandotte County is an even safer and more welcoming place to call home.

Our organizations strongly believe that the best way to assist the nearly 30,000 Wyandotte County residents who struggle with photo ID challenges is by creating a municipal ID card. Unified School District 500, the Kansas City, Kansas Community College, and the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library agree – that is why each has recently officially declared its support for such a program.

A municipal ID card is a form of photo identification issued by a city or county government. It can be used to prove a person's identity within the city/county limits or to access services from any institution that agrees to accept the card as proof of identity. Municipal ID cards do not grant anyone new benefits or services; they simply make it possible for the city's residents to access benefits and services to which they are already legally entitled. We can empower Wyandotte County's diverse population to use these resources, stimulate local businesses, cooperate with law enforcement, and show that we welcome people of all backgrounds.

Having government-issued photo identification confers a sense of dignity, access to vital resources, and strengthens community safety. Our organizations represent the broad and diverse groups that the Unified Government serves, and we see first-hand the struggles that many Wyandotte County residents face because they lack access to a government-issued photo identification card.

Our experience is not just anecdotal. Wyandotte County is a diverse and thriving community, yet as many as 1 in 5 residents belong to demographic groups that frequently lack access to government-issued photo ID. For example, 7% of U.S. citizens do not have ready access to citizenship documents, and at least 12% of adults earning less than \$25,000 per year do not have a readily available US passport, naturalization document or birth certificate. These documents are necessary in order to secure a state-issued driver's license or non-driver's identification card. This disparity is especially visible in our communities of color: 25% of African-American adults have no current government-issued photo ID. In addition, anyone who lacks a permanent address is unable to receive a state-issued identification card. Among the groups who most frequently struggle to secure photo ID are the elderly, immigrants, homeless, transgender individuals, reentering citizens, and foster youth.

Lack of access to photo ID causes many other serious problems. For example, residents often need photo ID in order to open a bank account, see a doctor, apply for public benefits, access public services, engage with law enforcement, or even pick up a package from the postal service. Individuals who do not have ID are often afraid to report that they were a victim of or a witness to crime, to solicit the help of local police, or to assist the police in the investigation of crime.

Assisting individuals in securing photo ID thus carries enormous benefits. It can help residents fully participate in the life of the community, stimulate economic development by bringing unbanked individuals into the financial sector, and improve police-community collaboration.

We believe that Wyandotte County should join the growing list of cities and counties across America that have already created municipal ID card programs, offering their residents a culture of safety, dignity, and security. Johnson County (Iowa), New Haven, Phoenix, South Bend, Austin, Milwaukee and New York City have all introduced successful municipal ID programs. The IDNYC program has been so popular that over 730,000 people applied in its first year. These programs have resulted in increased reporting and significant reductions in crime. A municipal ID program would do the same here.

Including our county's immigrant communities will be key to a successful municipal ID program. Wyandotte County is the only county in the Kansas City region with a higher share of immigrants than the United States as a whole. We are all safer when every member of our community can come to police to report a crime or give an eyewitness account, regardless of immigration status. Many vulnerable residents fear interacting with law enforcement—including to report that they have been a victim of a crime, or a witness to a crime—because they lack government-issued photo ID. Providing a photo ID option to all residents, including immigrants, will make Wyandotte County a safer and more welcoming place. In order to ensure that immigrants feel safe and welcome in applying for a municipal ID, it is essential that formal policies are created to protect the integrity of data that all residents provide when applying for the ID, ensure that the program is administered in a community-friendly way, and limiting the participation of local law enforcement agencies in immigration enforcement to those responsibilities that are mandatory under existing federal statute and consistent with federal court rulings. With strong and robust policies on these points, Wyandotte County can lead the way in making our immigrant communities feel safe and welcome.

All of our residents are entitled to the dignity that government-issued photo ID can provide. We respectfully request that the Unified Government take steps to initiate a municipal ID card program in Wyandotte County, with robust protections for the safety and privacy of participants. We respectfully request your support for this important policy priority, which will improve the quality of life for the individuals we all serve and make our community a safer and more welcoming place. Should you have questions or comments, please don't hesitate to call on us at 913.490.4101.

Sincerely,

El Centro
Kansas Appleseed
Communities Creating Opportunity
ACLU of Kansas
Cross Border Network
Advocates for Immigrant Rights & Reconciliation
MORE2
Project Rally
Central Avenue Betterment Association

Kansas Chapter of the National Association of
Social Workers
Sister Therese Bangert
Sunflower House
Kansas/Missouri Dream Alliance
Indivisible KC
Immigrant Justice Advocacy Movement
(IJAM)
University of Missouri-Kansas City
Amnesty International - Kansas City Chapter

CC: Board of Commissioners, Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City,
Kansas