

Chairperson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this critical issue. My name is Eva Jacroux, and I am a case manager at one of New York City's safe havens, facilities that serve as a last safety net for our most vulnerable neighbors. Every day, I work alongside New Yorkers who are ready to leave shelter behind and rebuild their lives in permanent housing. But I am here today because my colleagues and I across the city are hitting a wall: an administrative Catch-22 that leaves thousands of people trapped in homelessness for no reason other than a missing piece of plastic.

Here is the problem in its simplest form: **IDNYC requires a photo ID to get a photo ID.**

For someone with a stable home and a file drawer full of documents, this makes sense. But for the populations we serve in safe havens: runaway and homeless youth, survivors of domestic violence, immigrants fleeing danger, people whose belongings have been swept away or destroyed, and individuals living with severe mental illness, this requirement is an impossible barrier. These are New Yorkers who have never had an ID, or who have had their documents stolen, withheld as a tool of abuse, or discarded during a street sweep. Without a government-issued photo ID, they cannot apply for the very programs designed to lift them out of homelessness: 2010e supportive housing, HRA benefits, public assistance, CityFHEPS, and SOTA.

Currently, IDNYC does allow certain caretakers to vouch for a client's identity in lieu of a photo ID. But the list of eligible agencies is narrow, and, in what I believe is a profound oversight, **it does not include the Department of Homeless Services.** We are the very agency charged with housing this population, yet we are locked out of the process that could unblock their path to housing. IDNYC currently accepts vouchers only from: the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, the NYS Department of Health, the NYS Office of Mental Health, and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. DHS safe havens, which often serve as a catchall for New York's most marginalized residents, are absent from this list.

Let me pause here to name what this means. My clients are often better served in medical or psychiatric facilities, but instead they are confined to the shelter system. They are ineligible for the programs they desperately need, not because of their circumstances, but because of paperwork. And because IDNYC only accepts original documents, no copies, even those who can track down a birth certificate or Social Security card face additional obstacles. For immigrants, obtaining an original document from their home country can take months or be impossible. For individuals born out of state, physically appearing at a vital records office is not an option when you are unhoused. And for undocumented clients, Medicaid is only available as emergency care at hospitals, so they cannot use a Medicaid card as proof of birthdate, even if they have one.

This is not a failure of effort on the part of case managers. This is a structural failure. And it is condemning New Yorkers to a life sentence in transitional housing, and chronic homelessness.

I am here to propose two straightforward administrative fixes:

1. Add DHS to the caretaker list.

Allow DHS case managers, who have established, ongoing relationships with their clients and access to verified case records, to waive the photo requirement for IDNYC. This simple change would immediately unblock housing for thousands of shelter clients. We already carry the trust and the documentation to vouch for our clients' identities; we simply need the city to recognize that authority.

2. Accept physician statements as a backup.

Allow licensed physicians to sign a statement verifying a patient's identity, a practice already accepted by the Social Security Administration for issuing replacement Social Security cards. For clients with complex medical histories, this would provide a reliable secondary pathway to identification.

Let me put a human face on this policy failure.

I have a client who was adopted from Mongolia, later became a German citizen, and then married an American man and became a U.S. citizen. That man withheld her documents as a form of abuse and eventually destroyed them. She is now essentially undocumented, internally displaced, unable to apply for permanent housing or public assistance, and legally invisible in the country she calls home.

I have an elderly client from Appalachia who grew up in an unstable household and was seemingly never issued a photo ID. He cannot remember where or when his parents might have kept a birth certificate or Social Security card. He has been chronically homeless his entire life. We recently secured Medicaid for him, so he now has access to healthcare, but he remains blocked from public assistance and permanent housing.

And I have a client with a traumatic brain injury and schizoaffective disorder who cannot recall when or how he left his home. We traced his hospitalization records to recover his Social Security number. He has been street-homeless for years and has a vague memory of a sweep in which all his belongings were disposed of, including any documentation we might have used to get him an ID. He, too, is blocked from the housing and benefits he needs.

For two of these clients, I am pursuing a workaround: Access-A-Ride, which issues government photo IDs to members. Because they are disabled, they qualify. We are also applying for Medicaid cards, which provide birthdates. But this process has introduced months of delays, and if Access-A-Ride changes its policy or denies them, we are back to square one. My first client is

not disabled and does not qualify for Access-A-Ride at all. She has no path to IDNYC under current rules.

I am not asking for a new program. I am not asking for new funding. I am asking for a simple administrative change that would restore dignity, opportunity, and a path home to thousands of New Yorkers who are ready to move forward, if only the system would let them.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to this work. I welcome your questions and would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss these proposals further.

Respectfully,

Eva Jacroux

Case Manager and Concerned New York Resident

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