



December 11, 2019
Speaker Corey Johnson
New York City Council
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mr. Speaker,

The Progressive Caucus formally requests that the Council vote on proposed [Intro. 1706](#), legislation that prohibits the addition of a smart chip in IDNYC cards and preserves IDNYC as a secure identification card program. We request that the Intro. 1706 be voted on at the next Stated, Thursday, December 19, 2019, and therefore be aged by midnight today.

The City of New York's IDNYC identification card program has been a valuable resource to over a million residents. IDNYC provides safe and equitable access to government identification, especially among communities who face the harshest obstacles to obtaining identification, such as the homeless, youth, elderly, formerly incarcerated, and immigrant New Yorkers. Cardholders can use their IDs to seek employment, access healthcare, and enjoy other critical City services.

The value of IDNYC is precisely why we are concerned by Mayor de Blasio's plan to collaborate with a third-party firm to incorporate a financial technology "smart chip" into IDNYC cards. We believe the inclusion of a smart chip is a dangerous decision that has serious ramifications for the data privacy of the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Most significantly, while the City guarantees privacy by not retaining identity documents connected to IDNYC, any financial firm that partners with the City cannot make a similar guarantee because they are subject to federal laws that require the collection and retention of personal identifying information. As a result, personal identifying data will be subject to subpoena by the Trump Administration. This threat could jeopardize the privacy and safety of hundreds of thousands of immigrants who call New York City home, and who rely on our promise of sanctuary from the federal government's irrational immigration policies.

We are also concerned that the plan's financial benefits, as touted by the de Blasio Administration, are either misleading or non-existent. Inclusion of a smart chip would effectively turn IDNYC into a prepaid card, not a banking card. Although prepaid cards allow users to add money for making certain transactions, they do not offer access to a bank account, credit, or loans that a true banking card would enable. Further, prepaid cards do not offer similar levels of financial protection that real financial institutions like banks or credit unions offer. All in all then, the chip proposal will create an inferior banking product that would not address the root



causes underlying the presence of banking deserts in New York City or address the needs of underbanked New Yorkers.

Finally, while the de Blasio Administration insists that these privacy and financial risks will only affect New Yorkers who opt into smart chip functionality, this is actually no reassurance at all. The entire rationale behind creating a single, unified municipal government identification card was to give every New Yorker an equal status for accessing City services. By making the smart chip functionality optional, the City would in effect create a two-tiered IDNYC system. Not only would this undermine the original intent of the card, but it would make it even easier for municipal workers or federal immigration enforcers to make assumptions about someone's status and discriminate accordingly.

A smart chip was deliberately excluded from the original IDNYC plan, and public opinion has not changed to justify its inclusion. More than fifty of our allied advocacy organizations representing the majority of IDNYC cardholders strongly oppose the plan. We believe that these dangers will discourage New Yorkers from enrolling in IDNYC or continuing to use their cards out of fear, undermining the positive impacts of the ID program. Indeed, advocacy organizations who were integral in designing and implementing the IDNYC program have testified at City Council hearings that they would discourage New Yorkers they serve from using the program if a smart chip is added.

Intro. 1706 would preserve the original intent of the IDNYC program, without putting countless vulnerable New Yorkers at risk. As such, we the Progressive Caucus, urge passage of this legislation as this body's earliest convenience.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The Progressive Caucus of the New York City Council