

Pretty soon, New Yorkers will have official ID cards

Written by bert pelayo
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THERE'S a silver lining in the gloomy national immigration conversation.

Last Thursday, before leaving for an extended vacation to Italy, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed the bill providing for an official identification for immigrants without papers and other New Yorkers who want it.

When the IDs become available next year, New York will have the largest municipal ID program in the country, more than New Haven and San Francisco.

But how useful will the IDs be?

For the undocumented, it means they can serve as ID to open bank accounts.

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As of now, many of them are not able to do so for lack of documents.

But will the large banks accept this form of ID?

But there is still skepticism about the IDs in many immigrant communities in the city, especially among the undocumented.

Will they come out of the shadow, apply for the ID, and run the risk of being tracked down by police and federal immigration authorities?

In fact, immigrant-rights groups and the Civil Liberties Union have objected to letting the police keep their personal files for two years.

They think the ID system is just a pretext to smoke out illegal residents, with the intention of arresting and deporting them, especially those who have committed crimes.

Other advocates, however, say the IDs are better than nothing.

Since they work, live and pay taxes here, they should have access to medical care and social services.

Would the IDs entitle them to these basic services?

Under the plan, all ID holders can get discounts at museums, restaurants and sports centers.

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If that is so, even city citizens would want want to have access to these perks.

It's not known if the IDs could be used to apply for a drivers' license.

New York State is devising such a plan but such a law has yet to be enacted in Albany.

Some other states in the nation allow the undocumented to apply for a drivers' license, subject to some conditions.

Commenting on the ID card, *The New York Times* wrote:

“The program’s success depends on the broadest participation — not just among immigrants, but others, like the homeless, elderly and disabled, who can’t get driver’s licenses, and New Yorkers who are drawn to the card’s planned perks, like discounts at museums, restaurants and other institutions. The de Blasio administration has no idea how many will apply, but it’s crucial to get as many people into the program as possible. If the ID becomes a red flag denoting lack of legal status, it could leave immigrants as vulnerable as they were before.

“Done right, the card could be a model for greater acceptance and civic engagement for immigrants and other often-marginalized city dwellers. At a time of despair and setbacks in the national immigrant-rights movement, here is an instance where the good news is local.”

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