

Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless

on

**Int. No. 253-2014 – Legislation to Create Municipal ID Cards in New York City**

Presented before

The New York City Council  
Committee on Immigration

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Coalition for the Homeless welcomes this opportunity to testify before the New York City Council Committee on Immigration in support of Int. No. 253-2014, legislation to amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York in relation to the creation of a New York City identity card program.

### About the Coalition for the Homeless

Coalition for the Homeless: Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which now continues past its third decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation around the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates twelve direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers, and demonstrate effective, long-term solutions. These programs include supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS, job-training for homeless and formerly-homeless women, rental assistance which provides rent subsidies and support services to help working homeless individuals rent private-market apartments, and permanent housing for formerly-homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributes 900 nutritious meals each night to street homeless and hungry New Yorkers. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention assistance, client advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits.

The Coalition also represents homeless men and women as plaintiffs in Callahan v. Carey and Eldredge v. Koch. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan in which it was agreed that, "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter." The Eldredge case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The Callahan consent decree and the Eldredge case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults.

### **Proposed Int. No. 253**

We strongly support Int. No. 253-2014, which calls for changes in the City's Administrative Code that would allow for the creation of a municipal photo-identification card available to all New Yorkers.

### **The Importance of Government-Issued ID to Homeless Individuals**

A government-issued photo ID is an essential document to access even the most basic services in New York City. It is required when applying for a library card, entering public

buildings, reporting a crime, obtaining employment, leasing an apartment and opening bank accounts. Having a photo ID plays an important role in integrating individuals to their community and promoting a sense of belonging.

Without identification, New Yorkers, especially those in need, are likely to struggle in their daily lives. Government benefit programs and many private resources for low-income people require government-issued identification. Additionally, if an individual is issued a summons and is unable to provide photo identification, the police may detain him or her until they can positively determine his or her identity. The consequences of not having an identification card could be extremely detrimental and ostracizing for thousands of already vulnerable New York City residents.

As bad as these problems are for low-income New Yorkers, they are significantly worse for homeless people. Government-issued identification is often too difficult or impossible to obtain by the nearly tens of thousands of homeless adults who sleep in the municipal shelter system. Many of these individuals lack the resources to obtain a photo ID. Even if they are able to gather the required documentation and money to cover its cost, their lack of fixed residence poses a unique challenge to them.

The enactment of this legislation will help the thousands of New York City residents without a permanent home obtain a much-needed identification card, and, ultimately, help stabilize their lives.

Creating a municipal identification program that addresses the needs of New Yorkers regardless of their housing status will improve the quality of life of homeless individuals and families tremendously. It will allow them to better integrate into their communities, and take advantage of critical social, cultural and educational services already available to them.

Int. No. 253-2014 is a common-sense initiative that will help thousands of homeless New Yorkers obtain government-issued photo identification. It represents a valuable resource to our clients and our community.

We strongly support this legislation, and look forward to working with the administration and City Council to ensure that the implementation of the municipal identification program is a success, and reaches those individuals who need it the most. In particular, we look forward to ensuring that the implementation provisions most important to homeless New Yorkers – including rules around proof of residency and waiver of fees – is accomplished in a manner that makes the new municipal ID card accessible to all homeless New Yorkers who need it.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony. And, as always, we look forward to collaborating with the committee and the City Council on their efforts to better assist New York City's homeless population.