

Protect the IDNYC:

No Smart Chips. No Prepaid Debit Cards. No Digital IDs.



We fought for a secure city ID that would protect our communities.

Let's make sure it stays that way.

Why is it important to have a secure IDNYC?

In an era of increased surveillance, it is critical that government-issued IDs are as secure as possible. In New York City, the current IDNYC serves this need for undocumented, houseless, formerly incarcerated, gender non-conforming, and young people, and others who face barriers in obtaining state-issued identification.

In 2018, the City tried to add a “smart chip” to the IDNYC, and issued a proposal to partner with a private company. After widespread opposition, the City backed off from the plan. However, the potential digitization of the IDNYC continues to be a threat to the 1.2 million New Yorkers who rely on it.

What are the dangers of changing the IDNYC into a digital ID?

Digitizing the IDNYC would:

- 1. Collect huge amounts of data on our communities**—such as people’s locations, movements, banking info, and purchases—and link that to our intimate personal information.
- 2. Risk exposing New Yorkers to increased mass surveillance by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and police, identity theft and fraud, and ICE raids.**
- 3. Give significant control of the IDNYC system and our personal information to private companies, which profit off our data.**
- 4. Threaten the benefits of the program, and risk cardholders’ access to essential rights and resources.** People would be forced to choose between being part of an ID system that exposes them to increased surveillance—or lose access to city benefits systems, bank accounts, and jobs.

What is the IDNYC?

The IDNYC is NYC’s secure municipal ID card. After years of community organizing, it was created in 2015 to provide a safe, government-issued ID for all New Yorkers. For people’s privacy and security, the IDNYC system does not keep New Yorkers’ application documents and cannot share cardholder data with law enforcement without a warrant.

The IDNYC program has succeeded. Over 1.2 million cardholders use the ID to safely access city services, apply for jobs, and open an account at certain banks and credit unions.

What are digital IDs?

Digital ID systems are massive databases that track and store sensitive info about us.

Digital IDs can look like:

- A city ID with a “smart chip” linked to financial, transit, or social services accounts
- A card with a “prepaid debit chip”
- A driver’s license or ID stored on a phone (like Apple Wallet)
- An ID number used online to get access to city services

Digitizing city systems can have benefits—but digitizing sensitive information and tying that to our identities is dangerous. This can lead to increased surveillance and deny people access to basic rights and resources.

Learn more in [IDP’s Digital ID resources](#).

Credits: This resource was created by the Surveillance, Tech & Immigration Policing Project, at the Immigrant Defense Project, and designed by Objectively.

We need to protect the IDNYC once and for all.

We must pass legislation to permanently protect the IDNYC from becoming a digital ID.

What's so bad about a smart chip?

A smart chip would turn the secure municipal ID into a digital ID, putting 1.2 million cardholders at risk of tracking, surveillance, increased policing, and fraud. Making the IDNYC a digital ID would threaten the integrity of the whole program.

What about linking city benefits to the IDNYC?

This has been tried in other cities—which has proven its risks. In 2021, Los Angeles partnered with Mastercard and a company called MoCaFi on the [Angeleno Card](#), to distribute aid to residents affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, MoCaFi's business model may present serious privacy risks, particularly for undocumented immigrants. MoCaFi allows users to build credit with a rental-payment reporting feature [run through Equifax and TransUnion](#), as well as an Equifax credit-score tracker, with the data sold to lenders and other third parties. These companies have [sold data](#) and [continue to share data](#) with ICE.

What about adding a prepaid debit card to the IDNYC?

Prepaid debit cards exacerbate economic injustice. Companies promote prepaid debit cards as a “solution” for banking access, but these cards do not address financial inequity. Instead, they perpetuate a two-tiered banking system that increases marginalization and fuels corporate profits.

What about tap-and-go systems that let people use a city ID on public transit?

Tap-and-go payments for the subway and bus seem convenient, but come with huge risks of data tracking and sharing. The MTA and Cubic, the company behind the city's new OMNY card, [can store riders' data indefinitely](#). This data—including riders' movements, payments, photo, disability status, address, and smartphone—[can be shared with third parties and turned over to police](#). Adding this function to the IDNYC would increase the risks even more.

What about digitizing other city services, or a city “online portal”?

An “online portal” or website to access city services carries many of the same risks. If people are logging in with a unique number to receive city services, that information can be tracked and shared with government agencies and private companies.

Digitization of city services is not necessarily a bad thing—but we need strong data protection and non-discrimination policies before any digitization or automation project is even considered.

Over a decade of research on digital IDs shows the clear risks to New Yorkers.

Who would be most harmed by a digitized IDNYC?

- **Undocumented New Yorkers** could face increased ICE surveillance and deportation.
- **Unhoused people** could face increased policing and lose access to IDNYC resources.
- **People with disabilities and the elderly**, who are more likely to lack access to Internet and key legal documents, could be excluded from city services.
- **Young people** could lose access to identification and face racially-biased policing.
- **Formerly incarcerated people** could face increased discrimination, surveillance, and barriers to accessing IDs, employment, and other resources.
- **Trans, non-binary, and gender-non conforming people** who rely on the IDNYC for a gender-affirming ID could face discrimination in accessing documentation and resources.
- **Public transit riders** could have their movements easily tracked.

The truth is: We need increased resources for the secure IDNYC we have—not a digital ID run by a corporation that will profit off our data and put our communities at risk.