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NEW YORK CITY'S IDENTIFICATION CARD PROGRAM STARTS

By Mara Gay
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New York City began issuing its first municipal identification cards Monday, under a program meant to ease access to city services for almost half million illegal immigrants, and others.

The city's identification program is expected to be the largest of its kind in the U.S., offering an official form of identification to all New Yorkers, including those who don't traditionally qualify for state IDs.

"It fulfills a promise that we made to uplift so many New Yorkers who needed to be recognized and respected," Mayor Bill de Blasio said Monday.

"As a city of immigrants we had to honor our history."

The cards will be accepted at New York City public schools, hospitals, and 33 museums and cultural institutions. It will also be accepted at 10 financial institutions including Popular Community Bank and Amalgamated Bank, and by the New York Police Department.

The list of qualifying documents includes a foreign passport or consular ID, military ID and foreign birth certificate, among others. Applicants also need to show proof of residency.

Mr. de Blasio said the program was already popular.

"People are lining up, lining up enthusiastically, to be a part of this," the mayor said. Dozens lined up outside the Queens Public Library on Monday where Mr. de Blasio held a news conference to officially launch the cards.

U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, a Queens Democrat, said the program was a step in the right direction, but "is not an end-all for what is still necessary, which is fundamental immigration reform."

City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito said the identification card program is "an affirmation that if you live here, if you pay taxes and if you send your children to school here, you are a New Yorker."

It is also aimed at benefiting other populations who often have difficulty getting state identification, such as transgender and homeless New Yorkers, as well as the formerly incarcerated.

The card will be free in the first year of the program. New Yorkers can apply at 17 locations across the city and in 25 different languages.