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# IDs for Illegal Immigrants Take a Step in Los Angeles

By IAN LOVETT

LOS ANGELES — In March, this city stopped impounding the vehicles of anyone caught driving without a license, effectively allowing many illegal immigrants to keep their cars. Then, this month, the police chief announced that the department would stop handing illegal immigrants charged with low-level offenses over to federal authorities for deportation.

Now, Los Angeles could soon become the largest city in the country to offer municipal identification cards to illegal immigrants, with the goal of allowing them to open bank accounts and gain access to other services.

A City Council committee on Tuesday unanimously approved a plan to solicit proposals from private companies to develop and operate a city ID card system. The plan will now go to the full Council for a vote.

“This card allows people who have been living in the shadows to be out in the light of day,” Ed Reyes, a city councilman, said. “Some say this is a federal issue and not our problem. Well, I’m sorry, I beg to differ.”

Over the course of the year, city officials and the police have pushed Los Angeles toward the forefront of the [immigration](#) debate as they have tried to ease some of the hardships facing illegal immigrants, joining the growing list of states and cities that have tried to take immigration law into their own hands.

A patchwork of immigration policies now dots the nation, with conservative states like Arizona stepping up efforts to deport illegal immigrants while liberal communities like Los Angeles push back.

In 2007, New Haven became the first city in the country to issue ID cards to illegal immigrants. A handful of others have followed suit, including Oakland and San Francisco, where hundreds of people lined up for hours to get ID cards the first day they were offered.

The Los Angeles ID cards, like those in some other cities, will also function like a prepaid debit card for those who want one. City officials estimate that more than 12 percent of residents do not keep their money in a bank, in many cases because they cannot open a bank account without ID. Instead, they carry around large sums of cash, which renders them targets for robbery, activists said.

“This means a lot to this community of day laborers,” said Antonio Bernabe, a Mexican immigrant who organizes street vendors and day laborers. “Every day, they are victims of

robberies, because they have to carry their own money with them. They are not able to go into a bank and deposit their money, and they are affected going into a city building, because they need an ID.”

At City Hall on Tuesday, dozens of immigrant rights advocates, along with bankers and business owners, implored the City Council to move ahead with the ID card plan.

But Ira Mehlman, a spokesman for the [Federation for American Immigration Reform](#), a group that pushes for stricter immigration laws and enforcement, criticized the plan, calling it further evidence of the city’s effort to impede immigration enforcement.

“This city has bent over backwards to accommodate people who are in this country illegally,” Mr. Mehlman said. “If Los Angeles is going to be issuing government IDs, how do they know these people’s true identities? They could be helping people establish a false identity.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/17/us/la-takes-step-to-issuing-id-cards-to-illegal-immigrants.html>