

November 15, 2007

ID Cards for Residents Pass a Vote in California

By [JESSE MCKINLEY](#)

SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 14 — The San Francisco Board of Supervisors has given preliminary approval to an ordinance allowing municipal identification cards to be issued to anyone living in the city, regardless of their legal status.

The proposal passed the first of two required votes on Tuesday night, putting San Francisco, with a population of 725,000, on track to become the largest city in the nation to issue identification cards to anyone who requests one and proves residence.

In June, New Haven, Conn., passed a similar measure, believed to be the first in the nation. Since then, several other cities, including New York, have floated the idea.

In San Francisco, supporters said that the ordinance was intended to make life easier for the large number of illegal immigrants working in the city, many of whom cannot get access to services because they have no formal identification. The city already has a “sanctuary” policy forbidding local law enforcement or other officials to assist with [immigration](#) enforcement.

“I think it’s admitting the reality of the situation that we depend on, our tourist and hotel industry depends on, a labor force that’s supplied by, for lack of a better term, undocumented residents,” said Tom Ammiano, the supervisor who sponsored the bill. Mr. Ammiano described the measure as “a passport of sorts,” to “take the kid to the library or open a bank account, or report a crime without being deported.”

Supporters and opponents of such measures said states and cities were more likely to take up issues like this one since Congress rejected a comprehensive immigration bill this year.

“The brass ring collapsed in Congress, so the people on the ground are still trying to think of things that are going to help this issue down the road,” said Steven A. Camarota, director of research for the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, which advocates stronger enforcement of current laws.

And while Mr. Camarota said the card’s uses would be largely symbolic, he said passage of the

ordinance might force Democratic presidential candidates to talk more about immigration, an issue that public opinion polls show is of concern to many voters and has already been part of the Republican campaign.

“It keeps the issue on the front burner,” he said.

Supporters of the ordinance say it has more practical effects, including crime prevention. John Trasviña, the president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Los Angeles, said he had recently received several reports of so-called SOM, or Sock on Mexican, attacks in the Los Angeles area, crimes he hoped might be reduced if victims came forward.

“The victims are living in a cash economy, and they are reluctant to go to the police,” Mr. Trasviña said. “Having an ID card addresses both of those issues: it reduces the reliance on cash, because it opens up the opportunities for banking, and it takes away a barrier between community and police.”

Mr. Ammiano said the card would also be useful to other groups without government-issued identification, including the elderly, students and transgendered people, who have long found a sympathetic home here.

The bill, which passed the first vote by 10 to 1, will be taken up by the board again before going to Mayor [Gavin Newsom](#), who has indicated his general support.

If the experience in New Haven is any indication, the demand for the card here could be strong. More than 4,800 cards have been handed out since late July, said Kica Matos, the New Haven community services administrator, with a “significant number” going to illegal immigrants.

“The second day there was a line halfway down the block, and by the third it was all the way down,” Ms. Matos said.

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