



City to recognize MARCC ID cards

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Esperanza Latino Center adopts initiative to help clients, agencies interact

COVINGTON, Ky. - Wanting to further establish itself as a “welcoming” community, the City of Covington has announced its support for a program that will make photo ID cards available to immigrants and others who need them.

The decision - made via a recent vote of the Covington Board of Commissioners - directs all City agencies to recognize what are called MARCC ID cards as a valid form of identification for the purposes of using government services or interacting with law enforcement or other public safety agencies.

The Esperanza Latino Center of Northern Kentucky, which opened its one-stop resource center at 234 Pike St. earlier this year, plans to start issuing the MARCC ID cards at periodic “ID drives” in March or April, after it secures the needed equipment and trains its staff.

The cards are named after the sponsoring interfaith organization Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati, which started the ID project in 2016 in partnership with Catholic Charities of Southwest Ohio upon request of the City of Cincinnati. The MARCC ID program was expanded to include Hamilton County and several other local governments in Butler and Warren counties in Ohio. The interfaith organization FaithAction in Greensboro, N.C., has sponsored photo ID Cards in cities and counties around the country since 2014.

Covington City Manager David Johnston said the ID cards will fill a need in Covington.

“In the City’s efforts to fulfill our policy of being a ‘welcoming’ community, we hope to assist all people who choose to call Covington home as they access services locally,” Johnston said. “This program will help them do that.”

Covington Police Chief Rob Nader said the cards will be helpful to officers in a variety of situations, regardless of whether a person is a victim, witness, or suspect.

“That’s especially true when there’s a language barrier,” Nader said.

Some 2,200 MARCC ID cards have been issued in Greater Cincinnati since the first registration in August 2016, and they’re used for things like applying for a library card, accessing health services, reporting a crime, and visiting a relative in jail, said MARCC’s executive director, Margaret Fox.

“Until you’re *asked* for a photo ID, you don’t realize just how many times you *need* a photo ID,” Fox said.

The cards contain four vital elements: A photograph, name, address and date of birth.

The cards issued in Covington will cost \$15 and be valid for one year, said Leo Calderon, chairman of Esperanza’s board of directors and also director of Latino Student Affairs at Northern Kentucky University.

To get the MARCC ID cards, applicants will need two documents:

- A document that lists their current address, such as a utility bill, a credit card bill, a bank statement or a lease.
- A document that includes their date of birth, such as a passport, a birth certificate, a driver’s license, a foreign national ID card from their home country, a military ID, or what’s called a Matrícula Consular.

Applicants will listen to a mandatory orientation that explains the benefits and limitations of a MARCC ID (it doesn't serve as a driver's license, for example) and explains certain established norms, for example that police have a right to ask for basic identifying information, said Irene *Encarnación*, executive director of Esperanza.

In that way, the MARCC ID is an educational tool that will also deepen a sense of belonging.

"The identification card isn't just a piece of paper but another step in fuller participation in society and understanding what's required of you," Calderon said.

"We want to make sure that Spanish-speaking residents feel a part of the community, and to do that, they need to be able to access services and programs," *Encarnación* said. "For that, they often need a photo ID."

The cards can serve as general ID cards for anyone. But the MARCC ID usually attracts individuals who do not have a photo ID or ready access to government-issued ID cards, such as the homeless, people who don't drive, people recently released from incarceration, and people new to this country.

Esperanza's services are focused on the Latino community, especially the growing number of Guatemalan people. By various measures, that community is substantial.

A demographic portrait of Covington prepared by the Kentucky State Data Center in 2017 reported that the Hispanic community in the city grew from 0.4 percent in 1980 to 3.9 percent in 2015.

But the Covington Board of Education reports that Hispanic children make up 19.3 percent of students in the Covington public school system, including 20.3 percent of those attending Holmes High School.

"The next Census numbers are going to be very different," *Encarnación* said. "*There has been a wave here in Covington, especially from Guatemala.*"

But not all of Esperanza's families are new to Covington. Just the other day, she said, a Guatemalan family stopped by the center for the first time. They had lived in Covington for 13 years.

"We think the MARCC ID program will encourage families to come in out of the shadows," Encarnación said.

With Covington's decision to recognize the ID cards, Calderon said Esperanza hopes to persuade other agencies and organizations - such as Kenton County government, local health providers, utility companies, the public library, and other City governments - to follow suit.

"Covington accepting it was a huge step, and we appreciate the leaders' willingness to work with us," *Encarnación* said.

Added Calderon, "We're in the right place, with the right people."

People wanting more information about the coming MARCC ID in Covington should contact Esperanza at (859) 261-0862 or esperanzanky@gmail.com. The one-stop, walk-in center offers a range of services, including individualized education, employment assistance, and referrals to programs related to health, employment, housing, immigration, taxes and finance.