

BY EMAIL & HAND DELIVERY

September 12, 2019

Mayor Bill de Blasio  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

The undersigned community, labor, immigrant, civil rights, legal services, and economic justice organizations write to express our united and unqualified opposition to the administration's plan to add financial technology and a host of integrations to NYC's municipal identification (IDNYC) cards, which are held by more than 1.2 million New Yorkers.

We call on you to halt the City's pursuit of this dangerous, corporate-driven plan, which threatens to erode public confidence in IDNYC and expose cardholders -- particularly immigrant New Yorkers -- to serious privacy, surveillance, consumer protection, and other unwarranted risks. These very real risks far outweigh any purported benefits the plan would provide to New Yorkers.

Our organizations include leading members of the coalition that worked to design, promote, and help launch IDNYC in 2015. Collectively, we represent hundreds of thousands of low-income, immigrant, senior, homeless, and other New Yorkers who have benefited tremendously from IDNYC. Our opposition to the proposed IDNYC changes is rooted in our desire to protect the integrity of this vital program, and in our decades of work and expertise on privacy, consumer protection, immigration, financial services, federal surveillance, deportation and other relevant matters. Over the past year, many of our organizations have communicated our detailed concerns and steady opposition to this plan. We have participated in phone and in-person meetings with your administration, testified at a City Council IDNYC oversight hearing, submitted detailed memos, engaged community members, and consulted with national experts who have affirmed our assessments of the vast risks to which the proposal would expose the very New Yorkers that IDNYC is intended to support.

Last year, your administration began soliciting proposals from financial firms to host an EMV/RFID "smart chip" on IDNYC cards. According to the solicitation, the chip would allow cardholders to load funds onto their IDNYC cards, make payments to private vendors, and enable "integrations with public and private partners, such as the MTA's planned contactless fare payment system and NYC Health + Hospitals medical records."

If implemented, the proposed changes to IDNYC would facilitate unprecedented, wide-scale data collection about New Yorkers' travel, spending, and other activities. Indeed, administration officials have spoken publicly about their express interest in generating "big data" and revenue through IDNYC cards equipped with smart chips. Even if well-intended, connecting this kind of technology and data to vulnerable New Yorkers' identification cards would expose people to serious risks -- including dangerous experimentation or misuse by current or future administrations and private vendors -- that far outweigh any potential benefits. These risks are particularly heightened given the Trump administration's escalating attacks on immigrant communities.

The administration has asserted that an IDNYC-financial technology (fintech) partnership would "eliminate banking deserts." This is false. Fintech companies are not banks. They do not provide

branches and personnel that customers can readily access. They do not have legal obligations to reinvest in communities. And they are not subject to the strong, uniform federal regulations and consumer protections that govern banks and credit unions. Moreover, the fintech industry is notorious for data breaches and a business model that relies on the collection and sale of people's personal data. By steering undocumented and low income New Yorkers to these entities, the City would be perpetuating, not resolving, inequality in our banking system and potentially facilitating IDNYC cardholders' exploitation.

According to the City's own research, IDNYC cardholders want access to actual banks and credit unions. In fact, more than 9,000 people used IDNYC successfully to open bank and credit union accounts in the program's first year. The same research found that the top reason New Yorkers hesitated to get an IDNYC card was the concern that it was being used to monitor people. IDNYC cardholders simply are not clamoring for the type of "banking solution" that this proposal would advance. Recently, immigrant communities won passage of NYS Green Light legislation, which will allow undocumented New Yorkers to obtain driver licenses; this will go far to expand equitable and safe banking access for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

The IDNYC fintech proposal is neither progressive nor effective. NYC is home to a robust landscape of nonprofit economic justice and immigrant rights activists; community reinvestment and fair lending advocates; consumer law attorneys; community development financial institutions; and many others that are eager to work with your administration to advance truly progressive solutions to bank redlining and economic inequality.

IDNYC was created for -- and must continue to prioritize the safety of -- undocumented, homeless, and other New Yorkers who, more than ever, face real privacy and surveillance risks. The proposed changes to IDNYC are antithetical to the program's original purpose and scope, and would expose New Yorkers to unprecedented risks at a time when they can least afford to be subjects of such experimentation. For the security and stability of our communities, we call on you to ensure that this exploration comes to an end.

For further information, please feel free to contact Mizue Aizeki, Deputy Director, Immigrant Defense Project ([maizeki@immigrantdefenseproject.org](mailto:maizeki@immigrantdefenseproject.org)); Natalia Aristizabal, Co-Director of Organizing, Make the Road New York ([natalia.aristizabal@maketheroadny.org](mailto:natalia.aristizabal@maketheroadny.org)); Deyanira Del Rio, Co-Director, New Economy Project ([dey@neweconomynyc.org](mailto:dey@neweconomynyc.org)); Betsy Plum, Vice President of Policy, New York Immigration Coalition ([eplum@nyic.org](mailto:eplum@nyic.org)); or Daniel Schwarz, Privacy & Technology Strategist, New York Civil Liberties Union ([dschwarz@nyclu.org](mailto:dschwarz@nyclu.org)).

Signed,

African Communities Together  
ALIGN  
Arab American Association of New York  
Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development  
The Black Institute  
Brandworkers  
Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union  
Center for Family Life in Sunset Park  
Chinese Progressive Association  
Citizen Action - NYC  
Common Cause/NY

Community Solutions  
Cooper Square Community Land Trust  
District Council 37  
East Harlem-El Barrio Community Land Trust  
Families for Freedom  
Frank Pasquale, author of *The Black Box Society*  
Freedom to Thrive  
GOLES  
Green Worker Cooperatives  
Housing Court Answers  
Immigrant Defense Project  
Inclusiv  
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility  
Justice For Our Neighbors  
The Legal Aid Society  
Legal Services Staff Association, NOLSW/UAW 2320  
Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union  
Make the Road New York  
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.  
National Center for Law and Economic Justice  
New Economy Project  
New Sanctuary Coalition  
New York Civil Liberties Union  
New York Communities for Change  
New York Immigration Coalition  
NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives  
Pan-African Community Development Initiative  
South Bronx Unite  
S.T.O.P. - Surveillance Technology Oversight Project  
UAW Region 9a New York Area CAP Council  
UHAB  
UnLocal, Inc.  
Upturn  
Volunteers of Legal Service  
The Working World

cc:

NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson  
NYC Council Member Carlos Menchaca  
NYC Council Member Daniel Dromm

Commissioner Steven Banks, Human Resources Administration  
Commissioner Bitta Mostofi, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs  
Laura Negrón, Chief Privacy Officer for the City of New York  
Commissioner Lorelei Salas, Department of Consumer and Worker Protection  
J. Phillip Thompson, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives