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**Testimony of Wendy Cheng
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**Before the Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Council of the District of Columbia**

Public Hearing Regarding:

**Bill 25-0849
“Limited Purpose Credential Clarification Amendment Act of 2024”**

December 16, 2024

Legal Aid DC is the District’s oldest and largest general civil legal services organization, providing free legal assistance to low-income residents across a wide range of issues, including housing, family law, public benefits, consumer, and immigration. We offer walk-in intake services at our Northwest office and in Anacostia, and we also run a monthly immigration clinic at Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School.

Through these intake clinics and our work with existing clients, we frequently see challenges tied to obtaining an ID or driver license from the DMV. For many of the people we serve, the lack of an ID creates barriers to accessing critical resources like housing, healthcare, and employment. It is a recurring issue that underscores just how essential this bill is for making IDs accessible to all D.C. residents.

Imagine this: You are trying to go to a doctor’s appointment, but you cannot even get into the building because you do not have an ID. Or you are picking up your child from school, and someone questions whether you are authorized to do so because you do not have a driver’s license. Or perhaps you are trying to access a food pantry, check out a book at the library, or open a bank account - and each time, you are turned away because you do not have proof of residency or identification. These are the daily realities for many immigrants and vulnerable residents in D.C., and they are why this bill is so important.

Limited Purpose Credential Law Should be Strengthened and Expanded in the District

D.C. made a bold and admirable move when it passed the original Limited Purpose Credential (LPC) law. It sent a clear message that this city stands with its immigrant communities. But as with any policy, the implementation has revealed gaps. At Legal Aid DC, we have worked with clients who could not benefit from the law because they could not meet the proof of identity or residency requirements – requirements that do not account for the unique challenges these individuals face.

Take survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking. Many have lost their identity documents because their abusers confiscated or destroyed them as a form of coercive control. Survivors fleeing abusive situations often have to leave vital documents behind. Without an ID, they face barriers to accessing shelter, support services, and public benefits - the very things they need to rebuild their lives. By expanding the types of documents that can be used for identity and residency proof, this bill offers a lifeline to survivors, creating safer and more stable outcomes for people seeking to escape and recover from abuse.

For asylum seekers, renewing a passport can be dangerous or impossible. Contacting their home country's embassy might jeopardize their safety or asylum case. Allowing passports that expired within the last five years as an acceptable proof of identity is a simple but impactful fix that will help many individuals move forward.

Residency proof has also been a significant hurdle. Many immigrants do not have leases or utility bills because they live with friends, sublet, or stay with volunteers. This bill's inclusion of letters or affidavits from certified providers as proof of residency is a practical and compassionate change that reflects the reality of how people live.

The Proposed Bill Should be Amended to Ensure ID Access For Vulnerable Residents

This bill has the potential to transform lives. It helps undocumented immigrants access IDs, opening doors to employment, housing, and education. It gives long-term residents who have lived here for years but lacked documentation a chance to gain recognition and stability.

That said, there is still room to do more. Legal Aid DC has three recommended amendments for the introduced legislation: 1) expanding eligibility for LPCs to all D.C. residents, 2) removing the six-month residency requirement, and 3) allowing letters with a picture and affidavit from an Immigrant Justice Legal Services (IJLS) grantee to be used for driver's licenses in addition to IDs. These changes would address critical gaps and

align the policy with the realities faced by D.C. residents, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

Our first recommendation for improvement is to expand access to LPCs for all D.C. residents, regardless of their immigration status or whether they have a Social Security number (SSN). Right now, residents with valid SSNs who cannot prove lawful presence are excluded from obtaining both REAL IDs and LPCs. This creates a major gap for individuals whose proof of lawful status documents are lost, damaged, or expired. Without access to a REAL ID or LPC, hundreds of residents are left ineligible for all forms of identification.

This issue particularly affects vulnerable populations, including unhoused individuals, people facing housing instability, and victims of domestic violence. These groups are more likely to have their documents lost, stolen, or destroyed. For example, replacing a green card - a common document used to prove lawful status - is not a quick or inexpensive process. The current processing time for a replacement green card is approximately 21.5 months and costs \$465.¹ During this lengthy period, individuals are left without the ability to obtain IDs, severely impacting their ability to access basic services, find stable housing, or apply for jobs. For someone with a valid SSN but outdated documentation, the DMV system will not issue an LPC - even if they can provide a foreign passport or other acceptable proof of identity. This exclusion leaves people without the IDs they need to navigate daily life, and it needs to be addressed.

Our second recommendation is to add a provision to the legislation that removes the six-month residency requirement, instead of creating a 90-day exception process. REAL ID applicants, for example, do not face a waiting period. The same is true for public benefits, which do not require a residency timeline. In 2019, New York State passed "Green Light Law" which lets immigrants who do not have social security numbers to get driver's licenses. That law does not impose a minimum residency duration requirement. The policy works because it recognizes the immediate need for people to drive safely, lawfully, and access opportunities.

Further, the current six-month requirement also places an undue burden on immigrants. Applicants must provide two documents to prove six months of residency, in addition to two more to prove current residency - that is a total of four residency documents. For many, especially those who have just arrived or live in informal housing arrangements, this is an insurmountable barrier. There is no evidence that this requirement is necessary, and its removal would reflect D.C.'s values.

¹ The processing time is based on the information provided by USCIS as of December 2024, available at <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>. The filing fee is based on the current USCIS fee schedule, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1055?form=i-90>.

Our third recommendation is to allow a letter with a picture and affidavit from an IJLS grantee to be used as proof of identity or residency for not just IDs, but also driver's licenses. The current introduced legislation only allows the letter to be used for ID only. A driver's license is not just about convenience; it is also about public safety. We all benefit when drivers on the road are properly licensed and meet safety standards. For many immigrants, being able to drive is not optional – it is how they get to work, drop their kids off at school, or go to the doctor. Most people are determined to comply with the law, but they need a licensing process that is reasonably accessible. By streamlining this process for qualified drivers, we help ensure that they are tested, informed, and insured. Reducing undue barriers for otherwise capable drivers not only acknowledges their commitment to following the law but also promotes safer roads for everyone.

Conclusion

In closing, this legislation is a strong step forward, and Legal Aid DC urges the Council to pass it with recommended amendments. Let's keep striving to make D.C. a place where everyone has the tools they need to succeed and contribute to our community. Thank you.