

Good afternoon, Chair and Members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today on HB 3026.

My name is Kelly Diana Wessels, Chief Operating Officer for United Community Action Network, a Community Action Agency servicing the citizens of Douglas and Josephine County. I have worked with homeless and houseless individuals in my respective communities for over 25 years, the majority of which are afflicted by the conditions of rural, generational poverty.

The lack of formal identification dramatically impedes access to necessary services - identification is required by those very systems - state, federal and private entities - designated for the purpose of creating self-sufficiency and stabilization plans for the homeless.

The critical need for ID cards access for the homeless without repeated charges grows daily. This formal, state issued identification for individuals, so very common to us all and often taken for granted, are required for transactions and services to begin in social service, health care, employment and education. Public providers are often restricted by funding sources from providing or paying for desperately needed services on behalf of the homeless individuals until ID is secured in file.

Houseless and homeless individuals are 27% to 56% percent more likely to be victims of crime while on the street, their belongings stolen causing the loss of valuable identification more frequent. The caustic conditions in street living, and the nomadic behaviors necessary for survival on the street also lead to the loss and need to replace identification at a higher rate than general population.

Not having ID can make it virtually impossible to escape homelessness. It means being shut out of services that help the homeless move beyond crisis. It makes it much harder to get a job, find a place to live, open a bank account, secure disability benefits or life sustaining aid such as infant/child food benefits for their children, also homeless — and in some cases it can impeded access to a homeless shelter, depending on the operations criteria.

Homeless and houseless individuals do not have the financial means for the payment of ID or replacement, let alone money and access to the required accompanying documentation necessary for them to prove who they are to even begin the process.

Agencies such as mine spend significant hours in staff time, research, communication and direct payments to retrace a person's identity. Further

ID. Individuals through years of trauma, neglect and behavioral health issues may have difficulty producing the information necessary to complete forms, or may not be able to secure an address to receive the documents applied for in order to then apply for formal ID.

However, once obtained, staff accompany the individual to the DMV to pay direct the fees. While we make every effort to reduce the timeline, there have been instances where it took up to 9 months to secure identification cards for individuals. Delays impede access to life altering benefits, and extends periods of homelessness in our community, especially since we do not currently have low barrier shelter. The costs per person, related to replacement process of identification for one individual can be several hundreds of dollars, each occurrence, beyond the actual fees. Valuable resources that we receive must be spent on barrier activities such as ID replacement, that would be better spent on housing stabilization.

Furthermore, when these delays occur we increase the costs to communities in health care and law enforcement, as these individuals are at high risk when houseless. They experience repeated traumas, predatory victimization, and require medical interventions at a higher rate than the general population.

Without ID, delivery of aid is slowed to a halt, delaying housing placement and other supports, not just to the individual, but to their children. Some are forced to use lesser forms of identification such as Jail ID's which can cause the houseless individual trying to do the right thing experience stigma, shame, dismissal and additional barriers that would not be immediately present if they had easy access to general state issued identification.

Lastly, not having identification also contributes to the negative social emotional capacity of individuals, their invisibility is reinforced and their ability to be seen fully within the systems designed to help them is impaired. It can be a dehumanizing experience to not have one of the most powerful tools that asserts who you are, that you exist and are doing the best you can to establish a foundation to build a future upon.