

Facilitating Access to Birth Certificates for Low-income Manitobans

Moved by: SEED Winnipeg

This is a renewed resolution from 2019 with significant updates.

Whereas: Manitoba-born individuals must obtain birth certificates from the Vital Statistics Branch, which serve as a foundational piece of identification (ID) that is needed in order to access a wide range of government benefits, employment opportunities, housing, and mainstream financial services.

Whereas: The Vital Statistics Branch charges a \$30.00 fee for each birth certificate application. SEED Winnipeg has established an ID Fund to cover the costs of these applications and support community members through the application process; this ID Fund is now available through eight other community-based agencies. However, community-based agencies are unable to keep up with community need for ID.

Whereas: Access to personal identification is integral to social and economic inclusion. The \$30.00 application fee per certificate and application process create barriers for low-income and other vulnerable Manitobans to obtain the ID they require to fully participate in the economy and society. Over three quarters of the community members who applied for birth certificates through the ID Fund identify as Indigenous. Access to identification may be seen as a step towards reconciliation in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Call for Action #17.

Whereas: Barriers that prevent low-income and other vulnerable Manitobans from obtaining identification - including cost and complex application processes - should be addressed to facilitate access to identification and the corresponding social and economic benefits. While the Province of Manitoba has invested in providing access to birth certificates for Employment and Income Assistance recipients and through a network of community-based agencies, EIA caseworkers and frontline service providers face difficulties in supporting community members with complex ID applications, and have had to create additional layers of bureaucracy in order to administer these programs.

Whereas: Increasing access to birth certificates and secondary forms of identification, including photo identification and Social Insurance Numbers, will enable low-income and other vulnerable community members to increase their incomes through employment and government benefits, to vote in elections, and to participate in the local economy and community.

Whereas: The Minister of Families has a mandate to reform the child welfare system to transition youth out of care, and to work with the Minister of Education & Training to support EIA recipients to obtain employment. Having personal identification is critical for individuals to succeed without the supports of these systems.

Whereas: In March 2022, The Province of Manitoba introduced the Reducing Red Tape and Improving Services Act. This legislation excludes references to reducing red tape in Vital Statistics but as the legislation has not passed there may be an opportunity for the government to include red tape reduction measures within Vital Statistics prior to passing this legislation.

Whereas: Vital Statistics has taken steps to improve service delivery and transparency by meeting with key stakeholders in the community regarding concerns and publicly reporting processing times.

Whereas: The Vital Statistics Act and Vital Statistics Forms, Fees and Registrations Regulation already include a provision to waive fees (Section 9 of the Regulation), this provision could be harnessed to provide more efficient and cost-effective access to birth certificates by low-income Manitobans.

Whereas: Working towards facilitating access to ID for low income Manitobans relates clearly to two CCEDNet Manitoba Public Policy Road Map themes:

- Ending Poverty: To end poverty people need foundational documents available through Vital Statistics in order to access government benefits, employment opportunities, housing and mainstream financial services.
- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access: Simplifying application forms and processes will reduce barriers for community members.

Be It Resolved That: The Province of Manitoba implement the recommendations outlined in the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report on Access to Identification for Low-Income Manitobans, including:

- A. Establish a streamlined and non-stigmatizing fee waiver system that enables low-income Manitobans to obtain or replace a birth certificate free of charge.
- B. Provide timely supports to ensure that incarcerated individuals be provided with necessary identification, if lacking upon entering incarceration, and youth exiting Child and Family Services be provided the same prior to transitioning out of care.
- C. Support the creation of an ID storage facility in Manitoba to reduce the administration and financial burden of replacing lost or stolen ID.

In addition to the above,

- D. Ensure that in person services remain available to the public so that those without phones or internet connection have equal access to services.

How the Resolution will be Advanced: SEED Winnipeg and partner organizations will continue to advance this resolution through conversations with the Vital Statistics Branch and the provincial government. CCEDNet members are encouraged to consider the ways in which access to ID intersects with many other policy areas and continuously advocate to facilitate access to birth certificates.