

## **District of Columbia Department of Health, Office of Vital Records No Fee Birth Certificates for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness**

### **Definitions**

Homeless Services Provider. A community organization that provides services within the District of Columbia Continuum of Care (CoC) and enters client-level data into the District's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). A non-exhaustive list of homeless services providers is available at <http://www.coordinatedentry.com/assessment.html>

Homeless. According to the District's [Homeless Services Reform Act \(HSRA\)](#), "homeless" is defined as:

- A. An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:
  - a. An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;
  - b. An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or
  - c. An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 180 days or less and who resided in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;
- B. An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, if:
  - a. The primary nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for Continuum of Care services;
  - b. No subsequent residence has been identified; and
  - c. The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks, such as family, friends, and faith-based or other social networks, needed to obtain other permanent housing;
- C. Unaccompanied youth who:
  - a. Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing at any time during the 60 days immediately preceding the date of application for Continuum of Care services;
  - b. Have experienced persistent housing instability as measured by 2 moves or more during the 60-day period immediately preceding the date of applying for Continuum of Care services; and
  - c. Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities; chronic physical health or mental health conditions; substance addiction; histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse (including neglect); the presence, in the household, of a child or youth with a disability; or 2 or more barriers to employment, which include the lack of a high school degree or General Education Development (GED), illiteracy, low English proficiency, a history of incarceration or detention for criminal activity, and a history of unstable employment; or
- D. Any individual or family who:
  - a. Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against

- the individual or a family member, including a child, that has either taken place within the individual's or family's primary nighttime residence or has made the individual or family afraid to return to their primary nighttime residence;
- b. Has no other residence; and
  - c. Lacks the resources or support networks, such as family, friends, and faith-based or other social networks, to obtain other permanent housing.

No Fee Birth Certificate Voucher for Persons Experiencing Homelessness. A DC Department of Human Services (DHS) electronic form that Homeless Services Providers must complete on behalf of a client to request a no-fee birth certificate. Once completed and submitted to DHS, the electronic form can be printed and given to the client in hard copy, which the client must present to the Department of Health (DOH) upon successful completion of DOH's identity verification process. The voucher is used to provide the birth certificate at no cost to the client.

### **Process for Assisting A Client to Obtain a Driver License or Identification Card**

Step 1: Client Requests Assistance. An individual experiencing homelessness in the District, and who was born in the District, requests assistance obtaining a copy of his/her birth certificate. (Or, a case manager/outreach worker identifies a need to assist a client with obtaining a copy of his/her birth certificate.)

Step 2: Ensure Homelessness is Documented. A staff member of the Homeless Services Provider will work with the client to ensure their episode(s) of homelessness are documented in the District's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The client must have a record in HMIS before pursuing a no-fee voucher for their birth certificate.

Step 3: Complete/Sign/Submit an Electronic Voucher Form. A staff member of the Homeless Services Provider working with the client will complete an electronic form, called the *No Fee Birth Certificate Voucher for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness*. The form is available electronically at <http://www.coordinatedentry.com/forms.html>. Once all required fields on the form have been completed electronically, the provider must digitally sign and submit the form which is automatically routed to the D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS).

Step 3a: DHS assigns the client to the No-Fee Birth Certificate Program in HMIS. Once the homeless services provider electronically submits a voucher on behalf of a client, that voucher is immediately sent to the Department of Human Services (DHS). Staff at DHS will work quickly to confirm the client has a documented record in HMIS and will upload a copy of the completed voucher to the client's HMIS record. DHS staff will then assign the client to the No-Fee Birth Certificates Program (1829) in HMIS by creating a new program entry. DHS aims to have this step completed within two business days. Once complete, DHS will notify the person who submitted the voucher that everything is in order and the client can go to DOH Vital Records.

Step 4: Provide a Hard Copy of the **fully approved** voucher to the client. Once the Department of Human Services (DHS) has fully approved the voucher application, the provider who submitted the application will be notified and should print a hard copy of the fully approved voucher and provide it to the client. The client should keep this hard copy in a safe place and take it with them to the Department of Health Vital Records Division when they go to obtain their birth certificate. It is important to note that the hard copy of the voucher is used only to verify an individual's homeless status (and therefore

eligibility for a no-fee birth certificate). The individual must also verify his/her identity, as explained in Step 6.

Step 5: Homeless Services Provider Preps Client on Process and Documents Needed to Provide Identity. Homeless Services Providers should thoroughly explain the identity verification process to clients so they know what to expect and have the opportunity to compile applicable documents prior to their visit to DOH. While DOH staff will be onsite to assist customers, Homeless Services Provider staff should accompany clients that are particularly vulnerable, including those suffering from behavioral health disorders and individuals with limited English proficiency. Note: DOH is unable to provide appointments for the kiosk - it is a first-come, first-served basis.

Step 6: Client Completes Identity Verification Process at DOH. When the individual arrives at DOH, they should proceed to the Registration Desk and let the DOH staff know that they have a voucher before using the kiosk. The client will then proceed with the identity verification process at a kiosk.

Step 7: Client Submits Voucher as Payment. Upon successful completion of the identity verification process, DOH will determine whether a birth certificate can be issued. If so, the client should inform DOH staff that they have a voucher, so the fee can be waived. DOH staff will look up the client in HMIS Program 1829 - DHS-No-Fee Birth Certificates Program. If present, DOH staff will compare the client's HMIS record to the voucher presented in person and decide whether to accept the voucher as payment. If accepted, DOH staff will issue the birth certificate at no cost to the client and exit the client from the No-Fee Birth Certificates Program in HMIS. A client can only use a no-fee birth certificate once per fiscal year.

Step 8. Pick Up Birth Certificate. Clients that have successfully completed the identity verification process will receive a kiosk receipt. Birth certificates are generally available same day; however, some records require archive retrieval, which may take 4-6 weeks.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **FAQ #1: Will there be a new process for identity verification at the kiosks?**

Response: The District of Columbia Vital Records Division has a 100% Identity Verification policy. In addition to presenting identity documents, kiosk customers will be required to complete a short, identity verification questionnaire. Our kiosks are equipped with dynamic knowledge-based authentication (KBA) technology. The KBA service searches public databases to generate questions that only apply to the customer. We do not retain your questionnaire answers. Read the "Identity Verification and Certificate Entitlement Requirements" distributed today. If the customer does not meet our identity verification requirements, they will not be able to obtain a certificate."

### **FAQ #2: Do any of the databases search public sources where a homeless residents' shelter address may be stored?**

Response: If the resident uses their homeless shelter address on publicly available documents, the knowledge-based authentication tool would be able to access this information.

### **FAQ #3: How far back do you go into someone's public database history?**

Response: The databases accessed by the knowledge-based authentication service can access public records 35 years and in some cases older.

**FAQ #4: What if my client is unable to successfully complete identity verification at the kiosk?**

Response: For more vulnerable residents, we encourage the homeless services provider to accompany the client to assist in completion of the kiosk identity questionnaire. If the resident is unable to complete the questionnaire, there are other options for completing manual identity verification using the supporting documents listed in our Identity Verification and Certificate Entitlement Requirements. Additionally, a social worker, parent, grandparent, child, or sibling may request the certificate on behalf of the resident. See our “Identity Verification and Certificate Entitlement Requirements” for additional entitled persons.

**FAQ #5: What if I am experiencing homelessness in DC but was not born in DC -- can I still get my birth certificate from the DC Department of Health/Office of Vital Records?**

Response: No, DC DOH only has birth certificates for individuals born in DC. Individuals born in other states must obtain their birth certificates from those states.

**FAQ #6: When will the birth certificate no-fee voucher for homeless residents program begin?**

Response: This program is already being implemented with the kiosk program. Residents experiencing homelessness are able to use the no-fee voucher as a form of payment at the kiosk.

**FAQ #7: Will I be required to go to the DC Department of Human Services to obtain a no-fee birth certificate voucher for clients experiencing homelessness?**

Response: No. Homeless service providers across the District will be able to access the no-fee birth certificate voucher electronically and can provide clients with a hard copy once the virtual form has been submitted to the Department of Human Services (DHS) electronically. DHS will provide Vital Records Division with advanced notice of distribution to the client. The client will be required to present the original hard copy of the no-fee voucher at the time of the birth certificate request. The Vital Records Division will accept one no-fee voucher per person per fiscal year. Vouchers may only be used for walk-up services.

**FAQ #8: Does the client have to be in HMIS to get a no-fee birth certificate voucher?**

Response: Yes. To receive a no-fee birth certificate voucher from the Department of Human Services, the client’s homelessness must be documented in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). If the client is not currently in HMIS, but is experiencing homelessness, they should work with a service provider to get entered into the District’s system of record. If you are unsure which homeless service providers to work with, visit [www.coordinatedentry.com](http://www.coordinatedentry.com) for a list of organizations that can help clients get connected.

**FAQ #9: Does the client have to be experiencing homelessness right now to get a no-fee birth certificate voucher, or can the precariously housed receive a voucher as well?**

Response: The client must have a documented experience of homelessness in HMIS, which includes anyone who is currently experiencing homelessness and those who previously experienced homelessness in the District of Columbia.

**FAQ #10: Who at the Department of Human Services (DHS) is authorized to approve a voucher?**

Response: As of February 2018, there are only three DHS employees who are authorized to approve applicants for the No-Fee Birth Certificate Voucher, all of whom work in homeless services within the

Family Services Administration. DHS employees from other programs, like ESA Service Centers and/or Virginia Williams can submit voucher applications but are **NOT** authorized approvers.

**FAQ #11: Why do you require Homeless Services Providers to submit the voucher electronically, but then also ask clients to bring in the hard copy?**

Response: There are two reasons. First, DOH wants to make the voucher is easy to access for providers, and therefore opted to make it available electronically. However, this means it's available to everyone, so requiring providers to digitally sign creates some protections from abuse. Second, DOH is asking clients to bring in the hard copy to expedite processing and add an extra layer of security so we are only issuing free birth certificates to those who are experiencing homelessness. This duplicate process will also help ensure both DOH and the Provider have a copy should the client lose the originals.

**FAQ #12: What if there are few pieces of data associated with a client (e.g., few permanent addresses, no loans, etc.) due to long-term homelessness, institutionalization, etc.?**

Response: If the person passes the first step of validating the identity, a KBA quiz will be generated leveraging many potential data sources as configured. If a consumer truly doesn't have information in these data sources in order to generate a quiz, the consumer will have to provide identity documents in line with the agency requirements.

**FAQ #13: Is there any data to support the idea that KBA identity verification protects homeless population from identity theft/fraud? Any other benefits of the KBA for this population specifically?**

Response: This type of identity verification is designed to provide a tool to make it very difficult for an individual to pass themselves off as another individual. In this respect, it will enhance significantly protection for any individual including the homeless populations from having someone use their identity in a fraudulent manner. In addition to this benefit, the kiosk project and KBA presents an opportunity to expand options for individuals to verify their identity.

**FAQ #14: Will you continue to accept a letter from the residents' shelter as proof of identity?**

Response: As of January 30, 2018, the Department of Health (DOH) no longer accepts letters from providers as proof of identity for the purpose of obtaining one's birth certificate. Photo identification is not required to enter the Vital Records Division fulfillment center. If a client already has a letter that predates January 30, 2018, DOH will no longer accept those letters as of March 1, 2018.

**FAQ #15: Will the kiosks used to help verify identity be available in other languages?**

Response:

Yes. The kiosks will offer English and Spanish on screen. Should the client prefer other languages, DOH staff will facilitate translation using language access services.