

Maria's Story

When Maria Soto-Figueroa went to the Florida Tax Collector's office to get her Florida ID renewed, she had no idea she was about to enter a vicious circle of denials. With her birth certificate, Social Security card and proof of address documents in hand, she never thought she would be unable to get her ID renewed.

But when Maria got to the Tax Collector's office, she learned that without the marriage license showing the change from her maiden name to her married name, the Tax Collector's office would not be able to renew her ID. She left the Tax collector's office that day feeling certain she could get this figured out. When she called the state of Illinois to request a copy of her marriage license, she was told that they couldn't provide her marriage license without current state issued identification. Maria made another trip back to the Tax Collector's office where she explained her dilemma and was informed that she needed to go to Illinois to get her ID.

"I can't fly without an ID," Maria told the employee in exasperation. "You have my picture in the system. You have records in your system that I've used this name for many years. Yet I can't get an ID because I can't prove that I've been married. I've carried this name longer than I carried my maiden name."

Maria had been laid off from her job, and without current identification, she couldn't apply for unemployment. She feared she might end up homeless.

"It's so frustrating," she said. "You feel like you're in the Twilight Zone. You feel isolated. You feel helpless....like you don't know what you're doing."

After another phone call to Illinois, Maria went back to the Tax Collector's office for the third time where she told the lady at the front desk, "I don't know what else I can do. There's got to be another way."

"There's an organization I think that can help you," the woman told Maria. She gave Maria the phone number and email address for IDignity. Maria emailed IDignity the day before the June client service event. After telling her what she needed to do, the IDignity staff member told Maria to come to the event in the morning in hopes of getting this problem solved. IDignity's legal team was able to order her marriage certificate from Illinois in June and the very next month Maria was able to get her Florida ID renewed, something she was unable to do on her own.



"I just want to thank IDignity for all their help," she said. "The volunteers there don't get paid. They do this all on their own. They are willing to help you. They are the most gracious, most merciful people I've ever met. I don't know what I would have done without them."