

## All Rhode Island Drivers Should be Eligible for Driver's Licenses

Until the federal government undertakes comprehensive immigration reform and provides pathways to lawful status and/or citizenship for immigrants who have lived, worked and contributed to our community for many years, Rhode Island should provide driving privileges to immigrants who live in our state.

Legislation introduced by **Representative Williams (H5511)** and **Senator Ciccone (S153)** would allow the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue driving privilege licenses/permits to Rhode Islanders who are unable to establish lawful presence in the United States.

**Public Safety and Accountability:** Our state's driver's license system provides an important public safety function. To gain a license, a driver must demonstrate basic knowledge of traffic laws, have good vision and pass a driving test. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that unlicensed drivers are almost five times more likely to be in a fatal accident than licensed drivers.<sup>1</sup> This legislation will ensure all drivers are licensed.

**Rhode Island Can Issue Licenses:** Twelve states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have already enacted laws allowing driver's licenses for undocumented residents. These include New England states, Connecticut and Vermont, as well as California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Washington<sup>2</sup>. The driving privilege license/permit is not a valid form of ID for voting or other benefits but providing these documents has economic and social benefits for the individuals and to our state.

**Economic Participation and Opportunity:** Undocumented immigrants contribute an estimated total of \$31.2 million in taxes to Rhode Island, including \$3.9 million in personal income taxes, \$17.6 million in sales and excise taxes, and \$9.7 million in property taxes (as home owners or renters).<sup>3</sup>

Under the proposed bill, only individuals who have filed tax returns (or are the dependent of such person) for two years prior to applying for the driving privilege license/permit would be eligible for a driving privilege license/permit. Allowing our working neighbors to have a driving privilege license/permit will not only ensure they are safe drivers but can promote additional work hours or job changes that can improve economic security for them and their families.

The Latino Policy Institute's comprehensive analysis of the effects of driver's licenses for undocumented residents in the states that allow it found that these states have lower traffic fatalities, lower cost of car insurance, and declining poverty rates. The Institute concludes that "issuing driver's licenses to undocumented Rhode Islanders will lead to safer roads and potentially better economic opportunities."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [High-Risk Drivers fact Sheet](#) (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety).

<sup>2</sup> State Laws Providing Access to Driver's Licenses or Cards, Regardless of Immigration Status, May 2017, <https://www.nilc.org/issues/drivers-licenses/state-laws-providing-dl-access/>

<sup>3</sup> The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy's March, 2017 report, *Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contribution* <http://www.itep.org/immigration/>

<sup>4</sup> A Legal and Policy Analysis of Drivers' Licenses for Undocumented Rhode Islanders, Roger Williams University School of Law and the Latino Policy Institute, June, 2016. [https://www.rwu.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/lpi/drivers-license\\_report-legal.pdf](https://www.rwu.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/lpi/drivers-license_report-legal.pdf)