



Testimony in Support of H-5511
Linda Katz, Policy Director

House Committee on Judiciary
March 27, 2019

The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative William's bill (H-5511) that 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.

As of June, 2016 twelve states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted such laws. These include New England states, Connecticut and Vermont, as well as California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Washington¹. 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 benefit to the individuals and to the state.

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), according to The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy's March, 2017 report, *Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contribution*.² Under the proposed bill only individuals who have filed tax returns (or are the dependent of such person) for two years prior to applying the driving privilege license/permit would be eligible for a driving privilege license/permit under the proposed law. 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.

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 5 times more likely to be in a fatal accident than licensed drivers.³

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 that poverty rates tend to decline at a faster rate in states that provide driver's licenses. The Institute concludes that "issuing driver's licenses to undocumented Rhode Islanders will lead to safer roads and potentially better economic opportunities".⁴

Until the federal government undertakes comprehensive immigration reform and provides pathways to lawful status and/or citizenship for immigrants who have lived and worked in our country for many years, Rhode Island should provide driving privileges to immigrants who live in our state. This is a common sense step to protect all drivers as well as provide better economic opportunity for Rhode Island residents.

¹ 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

² <http://www.itep.org/immigration/>

³ [High-Risk Drivers fact Sheet](#) (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety).

⁴ 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