

GENERAL ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

LATINO
POLICY INSTITUTE

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Testimony in Support of H-7708 – Operator’s License - Safe Roads

On behalf of the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University, we strongly support the passage of the Safe Roads Act, or as it is better known by the community, the Licenses for All Act.

For nearly a decade, legislation has been introduced to establish a driver’s license system that would allow Rhode Island’s undocumented residents to obtain driving privileges. The legislation has failed to pass both chambers of the General Assembly, significantly impacting documented and undocumented residents alike.

In 2016, the Latino Policy Institute in partnership with the Roger Williams University Immigration Law Clinic produced an analysis called [*Driver’s Licenses for Undocumented Rhode Island Residents: A Legal Analysis*](#). Attached you can find the report for your convenience. At the time of the analysis, only nine states had passed legislation to extend driving privileges to undocumented residents. Today, sixteen states, including Vermont, Connecticut, and Massachusetts have all approved driving privileges. Our analysis also found that states that provide driving privileges have lower traffic fatalities, lower cost of car insurance, and declining poverty rates.

Rhode Island has one of the highest uninsured driving rates in New England. This has caused the cost of motorist insurance to be higher than other states. In fact, the average cost of auto insurance is *lower* in states where driver’s licenses are available to undocumented drivers. Additionally, states like Connecticut who have provided driving privileges for over five years have already seen an increase in revenue due to the inclusion of undocumented drivers. In 2016, our analysis estimated that the revenue to the RI DMV could be about \$800,000, but today, this estimate may reach nearly \$2 million.

As a state, Rhode Island has benefited for decades from the work and taxes of undocumented residents. Each year, immigrants contribute about \$31 million in taxes that help fund our budget and social services. Yet, most of them will never benefit from many of the services they help support. By providing a driving privilege to undocumented Rhode Islanders, this law will *not* provide in any way a pathway to citizenship, or the ability to use it as a form of identification for voting. This law will however, provide parents, students and caretakers the ability to drive to work, school, the hospital, and to many other necessary places.



Providing driving privileges to undocumented residents who live, work, pay taxes, and help improve our communities is not only imperative but also economically beneficial to Rhode Island. We urge this committee to once again pass this important legislation out of committee.

Marcela Betancur
Executive Director
Latino Policy Institute