



Testimony submitted to

Transportation Finance and Policy Committee

in support of HF 4

Tuesday, January 10, 2023

I am Veena Iyer, executive director of the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota. ILCM is a statewide non-profit organization providing free legal services to low-income immigrants. We have Minnesota offices in Austin, Moorhead, St. Paul, and Worthington.

We submit this testimony in support of HF 4, which would make driver's licenses available to all residents of Minnesota who can pass the driver's license examination, regardless of citizenship status. This legislation will benefit Minnesota families and communities, especially rural Minnesota communities. This legislation will boost Minnesota's economy, while making our roads safer for everyone.

Driver's licenses, issued by Minnesota's Department of Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS), allow individuals to navigate our roads safely and legally. In Minnesota, only individuals who pass the driver's test and prove lawful immigration status are currently allowed to receive a driver's license. That means immigrants lacking such status do not have safe, legal access to our shared roads. Currently, [eighteen states](#), Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico allow undocumented immigrants access to driver's licenses.^{1,2,3}

¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. "States Offering Driver's Licenses to Immigrants." Updated 2/8/2021. Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/states-offering-driver-s-licenses-to-immigrants.aspx>>

² Dave Orrick. "Why group of MN farmers supports driver's licenses for all." (Pioneer Press, 4/7/2019) Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.twincities.com/2019/04/05/why-honest-farmers-support-drivers-licenses-for-illegal-immigrants/>>

³ Paula Mohr. "Immigrant workers vital to Minnesota agriculture." (Farm Progress, 2/21/2017) Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.farmprogress.com/farm-policy/immigrant-workers-vital-minnesota-agriculture>>

Driver's licenses could be used as proof of identity but could not be used to vote or for REAL ID purposes. Issuing licenses without proof of citizenship status would not only benefit undocumented immigrants, but also those experiencing homelessness, the elderly, and other groups who may have difficulty obtaining hard-to-access documentation.

Driver's Licenses Are Essential for Rural Workers

Greater Minnesota and the agricultural sector depend on immigrant workers, who need safe and legal access to roads in rural areas with little to no existing public transit. Meat-packing and poultry-processing, dairies, and fruit and vegetable production and processing all depend on immigrant workers. National estimates tell us that about half of immigrant agricultural workers lack immigration status. The American Farm Bureau says: "At least 50-70 percent of farm laborers in the country today are unauthorized. Few U.S. workers are willing to fill farm labor jobs."⁴

Immigrant workers, including those lacking status, are essential to Minnesota agriculture.⁵ They need driver's licenses to get to their jobs, to go to church and medical appointments, to shop for groceries, to take their children to school activities—just like all other rural Minnesotans.

In small towns and medium-sized cities, as well as in the metro area, immigrant entrepreneurs fortify main streets with restaurants, groceries, and a myriad of other businesses. They help to maintain and grow communities across the entire state.

Driver's Licenses For All Benefit Minnesota's Economy.

In Minnesota, an undocumented immigrant's annual income would increase an estimated [\\$2,000-6,000](#) for full-time workers if permitted to obtain a driver's license.⁵ That means more spending, boosting Minnesota's economy for all of us.

Increased earnings are just the most visible and direct economic impact of making driver's licenses available to all Minnesotans. Among the indirect benefits:

- All drivers benefit from [lower auto insurance rates](#) in states that grant undocumented immigrants access to driver's licenses.⁶

⁴ "Economic Impact of Immigration." American Farm Bureau. Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.fb.org/issues/immigration-reform/agriculture-labor-reform/economic-impact-of-immigration>>

⁵ "Driver's licenses associated with increased earning and can boost the economy." (Minnesota Budget Project, October 2016.) Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.mnbudgetproject.org/reportdetails/driver's-licenses-associated-with-increased-earnings-and-can-boost-economy>>

⁶ Mauricio Cáceres, Kenneth P. Jameson. "The effects on insurance costs of restricting undocumented immigrants' access to driver licenses." (Southern Economic Journal, April 2015) Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/soej.12022>>

- In New York, research showed that [newly licensed immigrants would buy and register more cars](#).⁷
- Research in New York and Massachusetts found that [government revenue increases created by permit and license fees and license renewal fees easily exceed any costs](#).⁸
- [Connecticut's DMV collected \\$7.5 million in license fees over four years](#) – offset by just \$300,000 to ramp up the new license program.⁹

Driver's Licenses For All Makes All Minnesotans Safer

Availability of driver's licenses is a strong incentive to improve driving skills and pass licensing tests. Like everyone else, drivers without immigration status would need to pass a written and driving test to obtain a license, ensuring all drivers are certified to drive.

Licenses for undocumented immigrants means fewer accidents. Issuing licenses to undocumented immigrants led to a [9% decrease](#) in hit-and-runs in Connecticut¹¹ and a [7-10% decrease](#) in California.^{10,11}

With licenses, undocumented drivers will also be required to purchase auto insurance. After passing laws that allow undocumented drivers access to licenses, [New Mexico and Utah both saw drops in their rates of uninsured drivers](#).¹²

As of 2018, [30,700 U.S. citizen children in Minnesota](#)¹³ have undocumented parents, 2.4% of all children under 18 in the state. Undocumented immigrants with access to driver's licenses are

⁷ David Dyssegaard Kallick and Cyierra Roldan. "Expanding Access to Driver's Licenses." (Fiscal Policy Institute, 1/31/2017) Consulted 2/25/2021. < <https://fiscalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FINAL-Drivers-licenses-report-2017.pdf>>

⁸ "Empirical Studies Support Issuance of Driver's Licenses Without Regard to Immigration Status." National Immigration Law center, August 2017) Consulted 2/25/2021. < <https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/driver-license-research.pdf>>

⁹ Chris Burrell. "Licensed Undocumented Immigrants May Lead to Safer Roads, Connecticut Finds." (National Public Radio, 5/24/2019) Consulted 2/25/2021. < <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/24/719959760/licensed-undocumented-immigrants-may-lead-to-safer-roads-connecticut-finds>>

¹⁰ Chris Burrell. "Licenses For Undocumented Immigrants Seem To Be Showing Benefits in Connecticut." (WGBH, 4/16/2019) Consulted 2/25/2021. < <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2019/04/16/licenses-for-undocumented-immigrants-seem-to-be-showing-benefits-in-connecticut>>

¹¹ Hans Lueders, Jens Hainmueller, and Duncan Lawrence. "Providing driver's licenses to unauthorized immigrants in California improves traffic safety." (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 4/3/2017) Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2017/03/28/1618991114>>

¹² "The Impact of Allowing All Immigrants Access to Driver's Licenses." (Colorado Fiscal Institute, March 2015) Consulted 2/25/2021. < <https://www.coloradofiscal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/drivers-license-for-undocument-immigrants-cfi.pdf>>

¹³ Julie Gelatt and Jie Zong. "A Profile of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population in the United States." (Migration Policy Institute, 11/2018) Consulted 2/25/2021. < https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/UnauthorizedData-FactSheet_FinalWeb.pdf>

able to help their citizen children go to school, to the doctor, and to activities and employment, building stronger families and communities for all.

[Law enforcement supports](#)¹⁴ creating access to driver's licenses for all immigrants to be able to verify everyone's identity, giving them greater ability to protect public safety. Allowing undocumented immigrants access to a license, a way to drive legally, and a way to identify themselves to law enforcement would increase trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement, leading to greater collaboration and cooperation.

Essential Workers in the Fight Against COVID-19 Need Driver's Licenses

When the country shut down for the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed millions of essential workers who lacked immigration status risking both their lives and the lives of their loved ones to keep our country going. They are doctors and nurses providing life-saving healthcare, farmers and grocery-store-workers protecting us from food scarcity, and teachers educating our youth virtually. [69% of undocumented immigrants work in front-line jobs](#)¹⁵ considered "essential" to the U.S. fight against COVID-19.

Their sacrifices helped enable America to withstand the worst pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. Their commitment to our nation has been invaluable. We support federal legislation to safeguard these workers by providing a path to legal residence. In Minnesota, Driver's Licenses for All is needed to ensure they have safe, reliable transportation to work.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HF 4, modifying requirements for a noncompliant driver's license or Minnesota identification card to provide for driver's licenses and identification for all Minnesota residents.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹⁴ Multiple letters of support from law enforcement across Minnesota. (Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, April 2015) Consulted 2/25/2021. <<https://www.ilcm.org/advocacy/Lawenforcementdlletters2015.pdf>>

¹⁵ "Sixty-nine percent of undocumented immigrant workers have jobs 'essential' to fighting Covid, says study." (NBC News, 12/16/2020) Consulted 2/25/2021. < <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/sixty-nine-percent-undocumented-immigrant-workers-have-jobs-essential-fighting-n1251390>>