



NYIC 2016 State Policy & Budget Priorities Driver's Licenses for All New Yorkers

Recommendation

Ensure all New York motorists have access to driver's license regardless of immigration status.

- **Expand access to driver's licenses to all New York residents, regardless of immigration status, through regulatory, legislative and community education efforts.** The Governor and State Legislature should pass legislation that would allow otherwise qualified undocumented immigrants to apply for official New York State driver's licenses.

History

- **2002:** Governor George Pataki issued an Executive Order requiring motorists to have a Social Security number in order to obtain a driver's license, essentially revoking the driving privileges of hundreds of thousands of motorists.
- **2007:** Governor Eliot Spitzer issued an Executive Order to reverse this requirement reopening access to driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, but later that year withdrew his plan due to anti-immigrant backlash.

Community Need and Background

Twelve states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have expanded access to driver's licenses to motorists regardless of immigration status. In New York, undocumented immigrant motorists are faced every day with hard choices because it is illegal for them to carry out basic day-to-day tasks: driving to the grocery store, the doctor, church, or school. This may have devastating consequences for family members who face emergencies, and for many immigrants – such as farm workers – for whom driving is essential to their livelihood.

Allowing New York State residents – including undocumented immigrants – to access driver's licenses will help make New York's roads safer when drivers learn the rules of the road, pass written and road tests, purchase auto insurance, and register their vehicles – it will also help lower insurance premiums, decrease the number of accidents involving uninsured motorists, boost our economy, and build trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement.

Opportunity and Talking Points

New York State should pass legislation that will allow undocumented immigrants to apply for and receive driver's licenses.

- Allowing access to driver's licenses will help **significantly lower insurance payments**. In Illinois, which allows such access, it is estimated that if only half of the state's 250,000 unlicensed immigrant residents were licensed and insured, Illinois policyholders would save \$46 million per year in premium payments.
- New York State government will receive **millions of dollars in revenue in new fees** for licenses and registration.
- New York State's **economy will receive a boost** as consumers, workers, and contractors gain increased mobility and overcome barriers to transportation.
- Providing access will **dramatically decrease the number of unlicensed motorists** on New York State's roads. Since New Mexico changed its policy in 2003, the state's rate of uninsured motorists fell from 33% to under 9%.
- Allowing access will also **increase road safety and build trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities**. Police will be able to use licenses to identify motorists during stops and review their traffic records.
- First responders and health care providers will be able to use licenses to identify the individuals they assist. With proper and legal identification, witnesses to crimes will more readily report crime to police and cooperate.

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