



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 7708 Regarding Drivers' Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants
House Judiciary Committee
March 24, 2022
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Thank you also to Representative Williams for sponsoring the bill and to the bill's co-sponsors: Representatives Ajello, Giraldo, Biah, Morales, Felix, Alzate, Tanzi, Batista, and Hull.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 7708 which would allow the Rhode Island Department of Motor Vehicles to issue driver's licenses and permits to applicants who are unable to establish lawful presence in the United States. This bill would build on the bill passed in 2018 that required the Rhode Island Department of Motor Vehicles to issue motor vehicle operators' or chauffeurs' licenses to Rhode Island Dreamers – residents who were granted deferred action under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Executive Order of the Obama Administration.

Having driving privileges will offer some much-needed stability in the lives of license holders and the lives of their families because this bill would enable parents to go to and from school and work, drive their children to important appointments, and support their families and communities. Extending driving privileges to undocumented immigrants will also improve public safety on our roads because these drivers will have to take driver's tests and know the rules of the road and our state's traffic regulations.

As of August 2021, the National Conference of State Legislatures reported that 16 states and the District of Columbia had enacted laws to allow unauthorized immigrants to obtain a driver's licenses. These states—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington—issue a license if an applicant provides certain documentation, such as a foreign birth certificate, a foreign passport, or a consular card and evidence of current residency in the state. Momentum on this issue is growing. Just last month, the Massachusetts House of Representatives passed legislation providing driver's licenses to residents who are undocumented.

The Latino Policy Institute's analysis on the impact of providing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants found that states that provide these licenses had lower traffic fatalities, lower costs for car insurance, and declining poverty rates. I urge you to join these states and to support this very important bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.