

Drivers' Licenses for Immigrants

The Texas Catholic Conference *opposes efforts that make acquiring Texas drivers' licenses and identification documents more difficult for immigrants.*

Creating more obstacles to obtaining a driver's license increases the chance that people will drive without a license. More unlicensed drivers means more uninsured drivers, which carries with it negative public safety and financial consequences for all Texans. Furthermore, identification documents are the first tool for law enforcement to track suspects, yet the rules result in pushing many people further into the shadows.

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"Drivers' licenses and other state-issued identification documents are critical to the public safety of all Texans. Regardless of a person's immigration status, the community is safer when drivers have completed the basic training and test and when residents are registered in the system. "



-Bishop Joe Vásquez, Diocese of Austin

Church Teaching

- ★ "Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership to the human family, nor of citizenship in the universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men." (*Pope John Paul II, New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants*).
- ★ I want to encourage you and your communities to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrow and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home. This, indeed, is what your fellow countrymen have done for generations. From the beginning, they have opened their doors to the tired, the poor, the 'huddled masses yearning to breathe free.' These are the people whom America has made her own." Quote (*Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America, 16 April 2008*)
- ★ The Church makes a moral judgment about economic and social matters, "when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it."²⁰⁰ In the moral order she bears a mission distinct from that of political authorities: the Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end. She strives to inspire right attitudes with respect to earthly goods and in socio-economic relationships. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2420*)
- ★ *Access to employment* and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2433*)

Resources

- ★ **Justice for Immigrants** (USCCB) (www.JusticeForImmigrants.org)
- ★ **Migration and Refugee Services** (USCCB) (www.USCCB.org/mrs/)
- ★ **Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)

Drivers' Licenses & Identification Documents for Immigrants

Recently the Public Safety Commission adopted new rules without legislative authority concerning the issuance of drivers' licenses and identification cards to non-citizens. Creating more obstacles to obtaining a driver's license increases the chance that people will drive without a license. More unlicensed drivers means more uninsured drivers, which carries with it negative public safety and financial consequences for all Texans. Furthermore, identification documents are the first tool for law enforcement to track suspects, yet the rules result in pushing many people further into the shadows.

These rules punish and exclude some of the most vulnerable and hardworking people in our communities, yet they do not achieve their stated purpose of making our communities more secure or law-abiding. It is wrong to use immigrants to pave our roads, yet deny them the right to drive on them. It is simply not good public policy to fail to allow a whole segment of drivers secure identification, registration, and car insurance.

Denying Drivers' Licenses to Immigrants Harms Public Safety and Makes Our Communities Less Secureⁱ:

- Approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants currently live in the U.S. For the most part, these immigrants don't live alone, but with family members who either are U.S. citizens or otherwise authorized to be in the U.S. For the most part, they also are employed, supporting their families and paying U.S. taxes.
- Our immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed, but drivers' license restrictions are not the answer. Immigrants do not come to this country to get a driver's license, and they will not leave because they are ineligible for one.
- Drivers' license restrictions cause immigrants to avoid contact with state and local law enforcement. This means that immigrants are unwilling to report crimes and assist local law enforcement in community policing activities. This decreases community trust and undermines efforts to fight crime and save lives.
- Drivers have a responsibility to be tested for a license and to obtain auto insurance. License restrictions that prevent drivers from carrying out their legal responsibilities undercut effective use of law enforcement resources because law enforcement officers must divert their attention from catching criminals and protecting public safety to enforcing drivers' license restrictions.
- Security experts have made clear that it is counterproductive to deny identification documents to undocumented immigrants, because denying them identification makes the already difficult job of identifying terrorists even harder.

(Last updated August 17, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ National Immigration Law Center Fact Sheet. www.nilc.org/immspbs/DLs/FactSheet_DLs_2008-01-16.pdf. 2 Aug 2010.