

## **RESEARCH BRIEF**

# **LICENSING IMMIGRANT MOTORISTS IN ILLINOIS AND IMPROVING ROAD SAFETY FOR ALL**

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Since the late 1800s, Illinois has been a port of entry for immigrants from around the world. Today, 1 of every 7 Illinois residents is an immigrant (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Yet, despite recent State initiatives to welcome immigrants and ease their integration, the opportunity to drive legally remains blocked for undocumented immigrants, of whom there are an estimated 525,000 in Illinois (Passel and Cohn, 2011). Driving, for many of these undocumented immigrants, is a necessity. They drive to work; they drive to take their children to school; they drive to doctor's appointments, PTA meetings, and grocery stores. Since they are not eligible for driver's licenses, many undocumented immigrants drive without a license. This poses a dilemma for all: State and local authorities invest time and resources in arresting undocumented drivers, rather than focusing their efforts on dangerous criminal activity; roadways become less safe for all motorists; and undocumented immigrants risk being taken into police custody and separated from their families. In the State of Illinois, licensing undocumented motorists would conserve resources, increase road safety, and create additional revenue in fees. This brief suggests policy options that would provide a legal means for undocumented immigrants to drive to work and, consequently, increase both road safety and State revenues.

## **BACKGROUND**

In the State of Illinois, a person must show proof of written signature, date of birth, residency, and a social security number to obtain a driver's license. In the case of a Temporary Visitor Driver's License (TVDL), proof of legal presence is required in lieu of a social security number. But many undocumented immigrants do not have social security numbers and cannot attain one, so they drive without a license. Undocumented immigrants are especially likely to be working and looking for jobs with irregular or flexible work schedules. Many Illinois immigrants also live in areas without reliable public transportation and/or work schedules that make using public transportation difficult or dangerous. This makes them especially dependent on driving to get to and from work (Chatham and Klein, 2011; Donato, Durrand and Masey, 1992; Gomberg-Muñoz, 2011; Mehta, Theodore, Mora, and Wade, 2002; Piore, 1979).

## SAFER ROADS FOR ILLINOISANS

All motorists must be tested, licensed, and insured in order to assure the highest level of public safety, and, in light of the presence of hundreds of thousands of unlicensed immigrant drivers in Illinois, barriers to obtaining a license for undocumented immigrants must be addressed.

Nationally, the subject of unlicensed motorists is gaining attention. **A 2011 report by the AAA Foundation found an increasing trend in the proportion of fatal crashes that involved unlicensed drivers over the past 20 years** (AAA Foundation, 2011). The report also found that an overwhelming majority (84.5%) of all unlicensed drivers involved in fatal crashes were between the ages of 18-64; this indicates that unlicensed drivers are not primarily underage.

**In 2010, the U.S. Department of Transportation ranked Illinois 11<sup>th</sup> in the country in the number of fatalities due to motor vehicle crashes** (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2012). **Illinois is also one of the top ten states with the highest costs of motor vehicle crash-related deaths totaling 1.32 billion in medical and work loss costs for 2005** (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).

While these reports do not suggest that all unlicensed motorists are undocumented immigrants, the question we should be asking is ‘How can we reverse the trend of people driving without a license and reduce the likelihood of fatal crashes?’ Allowing all Illinois drivers to be tested and prove their knowledge of Illinois driving laws would improve safety on the roads.

## CONSERVING RESOURCES AND INCREASING ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Granting driver’s licenses to undocumented Illinois residents provides the State with an opportunity to conserve scarce resources and improve the State economy. When an individual is found driving without a license, that person must be taken into police custody. An arrest is made. The individual is booked and must appear in court. If undocumented immigrants were granted driving privileges, police resources used to arrest unlicensed motorists would decrease and allow for those resources to be spent on more serious crimes.

Allowing undocumented immigrants to legally drive would also boost their economic contributions to State and local economies. Currently, an estimated 525,000 undocumented immigrants reside in Illinois. **If 68.5% of the undocumented population applied for a driver’s license, the revenue from driver’s license fees (\$30 each) would total \$10.7 million dollars.** This does not include future revenue of renewals and additional fees for enhanced security (such as fingerprinting, which is practiced in Utah). **If Illinois adopted Utah’s model of charging a \$25 security fee, an additional \$8.9 million could be collected in revenue.**

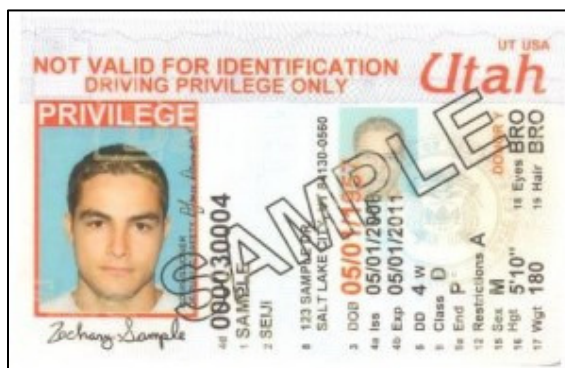
An increase in licensed drivers will also lead to an increase in automobile insurance. The danger of unlicensed and uninsured drivers leads to less protection for all Illinois drivers. When an uninsured motorist causes an accident, the other driver must be compensated for the loss of their vehicle and any pain, suffering, lost wages and medical bills associated with the accident. Without insurance, the driver at fault is monetarily responsible for covering these expenses and court costs if the other driver sues them. Although it is a requirement in Illinois for all motorists to obtain auto insurance, unlicensed drivers are refused coverage. **The rate of uninsured motorists in Illinois for 2009 was estimated to be 15%** (Illinois Research Council, 2011). Licensing undocumented immigrants would reduce the rate of uninsured motorists; and thus, reduce out-of-pocket costs for people involved in accidents with uninsured motorists.

Finally, allowing undocumented immigrants to drive legally not only ensures that they pay their share, but it also makes it easier for them to contribute to the local economy. **A 2011 study conducted by the Oregon Department of Transportation found that undocumented community members had trouble making large purchases and reduced their activities outside of the home because of their inability to obtain a driver's license** (King and Corbett, 2011). It also reported that workers face the risk of losing jobs due to their inability to get to and from work. Stakeholders in Oregon reported a negative impact on the workforce when one driver was not able to get his license renewed, and he provided rides to other workers. An Oregon loan officer also reported that undocumented individuals are not able to get to grocery stores or malls and are limited in their purchases because they have to walk (Corbett, 2011). **Not being able to legally drive limits undocumented immigrants' contributions to the local economy.**

### **NEW MEXICO, WASHINGTON, AND UTAH GRANT LICENSES TO UNDOCUMENTED MOTORISTS**

Three states currently license undocumented individuals: New Mexico, Washington, and Utah. New Mexico and Washington State grant a standard driver's license to undocumented residents because they accept an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) and country of origin-issued identification, such as the Mexican Matricula Consular ID card. In addition, undocumented individuals must complete a driving and vision test and prove at least 30 days of residency in the state.

The State of Utah issues a Driving Privilege Card (DPC). A DPC is different than a driver's license because it cannot be used as a form of identification for any other purpose, such as entering government buildings or boarding planes. Utah also accepts an ITIN as a form of identification and individuals must show proof of residency for at least six months. In addition to the driving and vision tests, individuals must complete a fingerprint card and submit a photograph. Individuals pay a nonrefundable fingerprint processing fee of \$25 in addition to a licensing fee. Utah does not allow undocumented individuals to obtain a Commercial Driver's License. After the requirements are successfully completed, the DPC is mailed to the applicant's residence.



Sample photograph of Utah DPC (Source: Utah Department of Public Safety, 2012).

### **POLICY OPTIONS: DRIVER'S LICENSE, DRIVING PRIVILEGE CARD (DPC), OR TEMPORARY VISITOR DRIVER'S LICENSE (TVDL)**

The states of New Mexico, Washington, and Utah provide two examples of policy options that could resolve the issue of unlicensed undocumented motorists in Illinois. A third option is issuing a Temporary Visitor Driver's License (TVDL). The Illinois Secretary of State issues a TVDL for non-citizens of the United States who have been granted temporary legal

entry into the U.S., who reside in Illinois, and who are ineligible for a Social Security number. The fee for a TVDL is also \$30, and it is valid for up to three years. **In order for any of these options to work, the Illinois Secretary of State's office would have to modify the requirements for acceptable identification to include an ITIN or country of origin identification card, and not require individuals to show proof of legal presence in the U.S.** The advantages and disadvantages of these three policy options are outlined below.

I. Issue a Driver's License to Undocumented Individuals (e.g. New Mexico & Washington):

1. **Pros:**

- a. Increased percentage of insured motorists
- b. Decreased rate of accidents caused by unlicensed motorists
- c. Decreased out-of-pocket costs associated with motor vehicle accidents
- d. Increased revenue associated with license fee (\$30), between \$10.7-\$15.7 million
- e. Decreased cost of arresting unlicensed motorists
- f. Increased economic contributions by undocumented immigrants with new ability to drive to work, make purchases, and open bank accounts

2. **Cons:**

- a. Driver's licenses serve as a form of general identification and can cause security breaches
- b. Potential for non-Illinois residents to fraudulently obtain a driver's license due to short residency requirement

II. Issue a Driving Privilege Card/Certificate to Undocumented Individuals (Utah)

1. **Pros:**

- a. In addition to the advantages previously mentioned in policy option I, a DPC would bring in an additional \$8.9-\$13 million dollars in fingerprint processing fees (\$25). **A combined total (license & fingerprinting fee) of \$19.7-\$28.8 million.**
- b. Increased residency requirement of six months and mailing the DPC to the resident deters non-Illinois residents from fraudulently obtaining a DPC.
- c. For security purposes, the DPC is marked "Not valid for identification" preventing it from being used to enter government buildings or boarding planes.

2. **Cons:**

- a. Expenses associated with issuing a DPC
- b. Expenses associated with mailing the DPC to a residence

III. Issue a Temporary Visitor's Driver's License to Undocumented Individuals

1. **Pros:**

- a. Same advantages as a driver's license, policy option I.

2. **Cons:**

- a. Same disadvantages as a driver's license, policy option I.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

After reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of each option, it is in our opinion that issuing Driving Privilege Cards to undocumented motorists is the best course of action. This option would increase road safety by testing undocumented motorists and requiring they purchase automobile insurance. It also alleviates security concerns in two ways: (1) local police authorities can quickly identify drivers, and (2) it prohibits the use of the DPC from being used as a form of identification. Though issuing a DPC for the first time would have costs associated with it, the potential revenue of \$19.7-28.8 million from licensing and fingerprint fees would outweigh the costs. As stated previously, the trend of unlicensed motorists is growing nationally. Issuing Driving Privilege Cards will address the barriers to obtaining a driver's license for undocumented motorists, make Illinois roadways safer, protect law enforcement, address security concerns and promote economic participation.

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