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## Bill to expand driver's licensing moves forward in Mass. House

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by Angela Yang

Undocumented immigrants in Massachusetts cannot legally drive, but that may soon change. A bill that would license everyone regardless of their legal residency status made it past the first step in the state legislature Thursday.

Advocates such as the 32BJ SEIU, the Brazilian Worker Center and the Driving Families Forward coalition have been pushing for a Driver's License Bill in Massachusetts for 15 years. This legislative session, however, is the first to see such a bill pass the House Transportation Committee to move forward in the legal process.

Natalicia Tracy, executive director of the Brazilian Worker Center, said this Work and Family Mobility Act is different from previous legislative attempts because the advent of REAL ID now allows issuers to distinguish all-encompassing identification from simply a license to drive.



*The Work and Family Mobility Act, which would allow undocumented immigrants in Massachusetts to obtain driver's licenses, passed the House Transportation Committee Thursday. SOPHIE PARK/ DFP FILE ILLUSTRATION*

“It is very clear that the driver’s license will be used for the sole purpose of driving,” Tracy said. “We’re also in a different era where we have a system that people cannot use a driver’s license to get social welfare, to enter federal buildings. They’re not going to be able to fly starting in October 2020.”

Both Tracy and Roxana Rivera, vice president of property workers’ labor union 32BJ SEIU, said permitting all drivers to apply for licenses would make roads safer. Hit-and-run rates have declined within the 15 states so far that have adopted similar bills.

“It’s because now more people are basically taking the test, they have insurance,” Rivera said. “If there’s an accident, they want to take responsibility but they’re not afraid that because they’re in an accident, that that means they’ll be deported and separated from their families.”

Currently, undocumented immigrants who cannot drive legally must find other means of transport, Tracy said, but many will choose to get behind the wheel when they feel they need to.

Rivera said many will take the wager of driving without a license despite knowing and fearing the consequences.

“Driving is a necessity, where if you need to take your kid to the doctor or if you need to go buy groceries or you need to get your kids to school,” Rivera said, “I think that folks do take that risk now, because they have to.”

Driving without a license, Tracy said, is a high-stress situation to face on the daily. A single traffic stop can lead to deportation when authorities realize why a driver does not have a legal license.

“I mean, I can’t think of anything more stressful than that for a family with young children,” Tracy said. “Therefore, it can create increase one’s possible reason for getting in an accident.”

The Massachusetts Major City Chiefs of Police Association, a group of police chiefs from across the Commonwealth, has endorsed the bill. In a statement last month, Chelsea Police Chief Brian Kyes said the legislation would improve safety on the roads.

“This bill would promote trust between law enforcement and all the communities we serve and protect,” Kyes said. “All Massachusetts families need peace of mind knowing that the drivers on our highways and city streets have passed the same driving test and know the rules of our roads.”

Safety concerns aside, Tracy said the passage of the bill would also increase revenues for the state. The bill could raise \$6 million for Massachusetts within the next three years, [according to a report by MassBudget](#), a nonprofit research organization.

“Those revenues, they come from registration, they come from tax revenues from driving, people being able to buy better cars because they’ll be able to operate with the driver’s license from the state,” Tracy said.

This kind of law would affect approximately 185,000 people in the state, consisting of undocumented immigrants who have

lived in Massachusetts for at least five years, according to MassBudget.

Zak Kahn, 19, said he believes the bill could be a way to help integrate undocumented immigrants into civil society in America.

“It’s a good way for them to get accustomed to our culture and maybe eventually legally become citizens,” the Roxbury resident said.

Timothy Johnson, 52, of South End said he thinks every driver should be carrying a license, as he has been struck before by someone without a license who, in turn, did not have insurance to cover the costs of damage.

However, Johnson said he is skeptical about the effectiveness of this bill.

“I just wouldn’t imagine that in this climate, that people are really looking to come out of the shadows to announce themselves that, ‘Okay, I’m here illegal[ly], I’d like to take my driver’s ed so I can drive better,’” Johnson said. “I mean, I don’t understand that that would necessarily work.”

Asiyah Herrera, 18, of Roxbury said she believes everyone should be able to obtain a driver’s license whether or not they’re undocumented, as everyone has places to go.

“It can be dangerous if they feel like they can’t drive or they don’t know how to drive in this country properly,” Herrera said. “In the countries they come from, the rules might be different.”



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## One Comment



**C.Cloy**

February 10, 2020 at 5:41 pm

I think this house bill is long overdue .