

Dear Senate Business and Transportation Committee and its members: Chair Sen. Lee Beyer, Chair; Vice-Chair Sen. Bruce Starr; Members Sen. Chris Edwards, Sen. Fred Girod, Sen. Rod Monroe, and Sen. Chuck Thomsen:

As SB833 regarding driver's license reform for undocumented residents is being debated in Salem, it is important to look at the impact that granting licenses to immigrants will have. This issue not only affects immigrants but everyone on the roads.

We are a group of PSU students in a Capstone class at Portland State University. In our class we have focused on advocacy and issues affecting immigrants in our community. Adelante Mujeres, a non-profit based in Forest Grove, has been helping us understand the challenges immigrant women face. In our conversations with women at Adelante Mujeres we learned that the impact of current state law related to driver's licenses is far greater than we had imagined. We are concerned about being on the road with drivers that have not taken a driving exam or do not have insurance. We want to feel safe. *This is not an immigration issue, but a safety issue.* The federal government can decide on the immigration reform. However, it is up to the state of Oregon to provide safety to its residents.

Oregon tightened requirements on obtaining driver's licenses in 2008. Since that time, the number of Spanish-speaking license applicants has dramatically decreased by 90%. However, this does not mean people have stopped driving. Many immigrants work in agriculture. In rural areas public transportation is virtually nonexistent. Driving is usually the only option for getting to work. Also, families need to take their children to school, attend meetings or go to the doctor. Taking a bus is not an option because of the location.

Workers will not quit their jobs because they do not have a driver's license. They have families to feed. So, who is to blame? Immigrants who are trying to provide for their families by working jobs that most American citizens won't do, or employers who are not complying with employment laws? The answer is neither.

In Oregon we depend on immigrants to fill low-wage occupations such as housekeeping, food service, and agriculture. In 2010, undocumented immigrants accounted for 5% of Oregon's workforce. You can say, "Deport them all!" But what would happen to our already fragile economy? Businesses that depend on immigrants for labor would suffer. We need to continue to support a mobile workforce in Oregon by providing driver's licenses to all residents who prove their ability to drive.

Furthermore, changing legislation will allow law enforcement officers to be more effective in performing their duty of protecting law-abiding residents, instead of detaining individuals for minor traffic violations. Ask yourself if you would rather the police detain drunk drivers or spend their time arresting an immigrant mom taking her kids to school.

Allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license would also generate revenue for the Department of Motor Vehicles and insurance companies. Recent reports state that roughly 80,000 Oregon residents' driver's licenses will be expired by 2016. These are licenses people will not be able to renew because of the 2008 drivers license law. Doesn't this mean that the DMV is losing a lot of money which also affects the Oregon economy?

We identify with the women at Adelante Mujeres. They want to drive to work without worrying about being detained and then separated from their families. They want and need to be part of their children's education by volunteering at their children's schools and attending meetings in the evenings. However, they can't because they don't have a license to drive legally. Having access to a driver's license regardless of your legal status is essential for every Oregon resident. The children of many undocumented immigrants are citizens and need their parents to be involved in their schools. The lack of a driver's license affects the child's development greatly and impacts their self-esteem and sense of security as citizens of this country.

In Oregon, driving is a necessity for economic growth, for better law enforcement, and for an engaged and safer community. We hope you will join us in supporting SB833.

Sincerely,

Camelia Mayfield - Portland, OR;

Viviana González Portland -OR;

Rosie Zuriaga, Portland – OR; and

Veronica Bradford - Portland, OR on behalf of the PSU Capstone class, Winter 2013.



PSU and Adelante Mujeres students and staff with Representative Joe Gallegos