

April 17, 2019

To: Joint Committee on Transportation

From: Vanessa Sanchez, Oregon resident

RE: House Bill 2015: Equal Access to Roads Act

Co-Chair Senator Lee Beyer, Co-Chair Representative Caddy McKeown, and Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

I am writing to you today to implore you to support HB 2015 as it will significantly improve the well-being of many immigrant community members throughout Oregon as well as their neighbors.

As a first generation Latina who was born and raised in the rural town of Hood River, I know firsthand the incredible access having a driver's license gives someone. Living in a rural community made it so having a mode of reliable transportation is essential in being able to find and maintain work or even to fulfill the most basic of needs like healthcare, education, and food. As a child, I was lucky that my immigrant parents were in a position to access a driver's license and provide me with safe transportation, but I fear for so many of the families who must struggle with this on the daily basis. I think of how few sidewalks and grocery stores can be found in my hometown and how harsh the winter weather can be, just as is true for so many other towns in Oregon. I can only imagine the fear and stress for those who find themselves having to fight this issue every day of their lives. Without the ability to obtain a license, we are preventing many Oregonians from taking part in their communities without fear or demonization of their existence.

Having worked with domestic violence survivors for many years and now being in the process of becoming of a social worker, I often see how important it is for vulnerable populations to have the ability to drive in order to access help or support in their journeys. Imagine being in the shoes of a domestic violence survivor trying to make the decision to leave with your small child but having to worry that you might end up right back in the hands of your abuser because you cannot legally drive. How do you get to a safe place when you're miles and miles away from a safe place or get your child to and from school? How do you pick up groceries or get to your appointments with the agencies that can help you reach self-sufficiency? Without a driver's license, the answer often is you don't.

Reading through some of the descending opinions leaves me the impression that the opposition is stuck in the throes of racism and xenophobia. Oregon has a long and twisted history with racism and we must put a stop to it through the policies and ideas we implement. We need HB 2015 and we need it now.

Respectfully,
Vanessa Sanchez