



Empire Justice Center

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Memorandum of Support

Enhance Law Enforcement and Safety on the Roads, Generate Significant Revenue for New York State; Pass the Green Light Bill!

A.3675 (Crespo)/S.1747 (Sepulveda)

Over 750,000 New York residents are unable, because of their immigration status, to drive legally in this state. Thousands more may lose their right to drive due to impending changes to TPS and DACA status. By creating a special, limited license, available regardless of immigration status, New York can protect a critically important sector of our workforce, create a new source of state revenue, and enhance law enforcement and safety on the roads. For these reasons, **Empire Justice Center we strongly and urgently support the Green Light NY bill, A.3675 (Crespo)/S.1747 (Sepulveda).**

The impact of no license - Hundreds of thousands of immigrants in New York, wanting and needing to support their families, educate their children, and thrive in their communities, cannot obtain drivers' licenses. As a result, they cannot legally drive, cannot register or insure their cars, and thus struggle to perform what has become an indispensable role in our workforce. Indeed, in most of the state, a car is absolutely essential for getting to work, to school, and to health care appointments; to take care of basic necessities. Not only does the lack of a license make these activities more difficult, it also deprives people of a valid source of identification, making any interaction with the police even more fraught with fear and danger.

A remedy: The Standard License – Under the federal REAL ID Act, New York and all states must meet new standards for their drivers' licenses. The mandate to reconfigure the license resulted in the creation of a new type of license, one that cannot be used for federal purposes, but can authorize a holder of the license to drive in this state. By making this "Standard License" available regardless of immigration status, New York will eliminate the hazards described above: cars will be registered and inspected, driving tests can be taken, fear of the police will diminish, cooperation with the police will increase, and a source of identification will have been created.

Twelve states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws to allow undocumented

immigrants to obtain a driver's license. These states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Vermont and Washington. These states have all recognized that their state would be well-served by creating a driver's license that could be available without regard to immigration status.

Economic benefits – This bill is clearly not primarily about generating economic gains for the state, but this is an instance of significantly beneficial unintended consequences! The Fiscal Policy Institute has estimated that the State and Counties would receive a total \$57 million in annual revenue, and \$26 million in one-time revenue through taxes and fees. When thousands more licensed drivers purchase insurance, premiums for everyone should be modestly reduced. The general State economy will reap the benefit of more car purchases and more immigrants will take jobs that were previously inaccessible.

Law enforcement: A range of concerns have been raised regarding the potential impact of the Green Light law on law enforcement. We believe that these concerns stem largely from inadequate information about the intent and the letter of the law. In fact:

- With more licensed drivers, police will be able to identify motorists and review their traffic records, a clear improvement in law enforcement;
- The Standard License is clearly marked as “Not for Federal Purposes,” and therefore cannot be used to register to vote, to board a plane, or as evidence of citizenship. Concerns in this regard are simply unfounded;
- Records will be retained for at least six months and will be accessible by law enforcement with a judicial subpoena. But the individual is also protected against wholesale demands for records, in that subpoenas must include the name of the individual whose information is being requested, and bad faith demands for information can be denied.

Thus, the law will in no way compromise – but will likely enhance – law enforcement efforts. It can also be anticipated that State residents who now possess the Standard License will be actually be more likely to contact and cooperate with law enforcement officials without fears that have sometimes impeded this communication.

Support the Green Light bill: The Green Light legislation will improve road safety, produce new revenues for the State and Counties, facilitate the work of law enforcement, and enhance immigrants' access to and participation in work that has become a vital component of our economy. We urge you to support A.3675/S.1747.

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