Driver’s Licenses for People Without Social Security Numbers

Eliminate the requirement of a social security number for obtaining a driver’s license

Kenyon Fraser '16
Nathan Needle '15

Current state standards require a social security or visa number prior to being granted a driver’s permit or license, yet many immigrants cannot provide such documentation. These drivers cannot obtain insurance, thus posing a problem to other operators and placing the onus on law enforcement to apprehend residents who are more than eager to take part in the legal process. This bill would prohibit the Registrar of Motor Vehicles from denying a prospective applicant due to lack of a social security number, therefore making immigrants able to obtain a license and, by association, liability insurance.

The Bill
H.2985: An Act relative to safe driving

Elevator Speech
Hello my name is Nathan Needle, and this is my colleague Kenyon Fraser. I am a registered and frequent Massachusetts voter. We’re students from Brandeis University and we would like to speak with you about the Safe Driving Act.

For the safety of our communities, it is essential that all drivers be trained and insured. Due to their immigration status many hard working Massachusetts residents are unable to obtain a driver’s license.

Many drivers are more than willing to obtain licenses, but are unable due to current legal qualifications. The Safe Driving Act would allow such residents to obtain a license that would qualify them for insurance, while also documenting a previously undocumented portion of the population and increasing revenue within the Commonwealth. This helps the law enforcement community be safer when encountering members of their community and not be expected to be primary enforcers of Federal Immigration Policy. The Safe Driving Act will also add to the revenue of the state by allowing a new portion of the population to purchase a driver’s license, potentially adding to the RMV’s budget and allowing for shorter wait times. Please favorably vote An Act Relative to Safe Driving out of committee.

Nathan Needle '15 and Kenyon Fraser '16
Members of the Ways and Means Committee and Chairman Dempsey, my name is Kenyon Fraser and I, along with my colleague Nathan Needle, a Massachusetts voter, are students at Brandeis University. I am writing (speaking) to you today about an issue concerning the safety of Massachusetts citizens. Nathan and I are not just students, we like many others in this state are drivers.

We drive on the roads of Massachusetts expecting certain protections. All drivers in Massachusetts are required to take a test to ensure that they are able to safely operate a motor vehicle. All drivers are required to have auto insurance in order to reduce the exorbitant costs of accidents on the roads. However, portions of the workers vital to the Massachusetts economy are unable to obtain a license or insurance. I am speaking about the people within this state whose immigration status prevents them from legally obtaining a drivers license. These are people who through no fault of their own are forced into a situation where they must either drive “unlicensed, untrained, and uninsured” or be unable to take advantage of basic services and opportunities that are promised to all. H. 2985, An Act Relative to Safe Driving offers a solution by allowing immigrants to obtain a temporary, visually distinct drivers license.

This winter has proven that public transportation is not always a reliable means to get to and from work. This bill does not just affect immigrants. Their inability to follow the law presents a hazard to all drivers on the road. While driving, people like Nathan and myself expect that others behind the wheel have the same training that we do. We expect that should an accident occur that the costs will be manageable because all involved parties are insured. When uninsured drivers get into accidents they raise costs for other drivers on the road. H. 2985, An Act Relative to Safe Driving would make this possible for all Massachusetts residents. 10 other states have already adopted similar laws. It is time for the Massachusetts Legislature to take the step forward to ensure that it is responsibly managing the people it represents and to help protect the safety of everyone on the roads.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Kenyon

Sean Getchell was the legislative aide for Representative Ryan and was an incredibly useful resource for the Safe Driving Bill. He provided a new angle on the bill that we had largely not thought about before speaking with him, specifically how the bill affects the Irish population in Massachusetts. Events like Immigrants Day focused primarily on issues that white English-speaking immigrants are not obviously struggling from. Very few Irish immigrants are struggling to learn English, but they still need to obtain a driver's license in order to join the workforce, and face the same struggles as other immigrants when working towards this goal. He was able to give us some behind the scenes indicators as to the state of the bill and the difficulties going back and forth between the House and the Senate. In addition to this information Sean was also able to connect us with the International Irish Immigration Center, an organization dedicated to helping recent immigrants to the United States.

Nathan

Kenyon and I arrived at Immigrants’ Day just as the speakers were getting underway. In addition to the Safe Driving Act, multiple other pieces of legislation – both state and federal – were at the forefront of the day’s activities. We were greeted at the door by Johanne, who was happy to meet Kenyon and make sure it would be all right for us to film. The first three speakers did not touch upon the issue at great length, but the fourth, Zoila Lopez from Waltham, provided great insight (not to mention footage for the video). Lopez, a victim of domestic violence in her native Guatemala, came to Massachusetts at age 19. Now a mother of seven in her mid-40s, she has been unable to legally obtain a license for two and a half decades. Often pausing to wipe the tears from her eyes, she emotionally recounted the difficulties she faces in her predicament. She is unable to drive her children to school or to the hospital, unable to cash a check or open a bank account, and unable to visit her mother in Guatemala. Up to this point, so much of our focus had been concerned with the public safety implications of the bill that it was sobering to see a room full of people so greatly affected by the status quo. The day truly helped to put the importance of the bill in perspective.

Update

As of September, the official record noted that the Senate had concurred and the House had referred the bill to the Committee on Transportation.

For more information

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA)
miracoalition.org