Driver’s Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants

Allowing all residents to be trained, licensed and insured drivers

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Unlicensed drivers are five times more likely to get into a fatal car accident than a licensed driver. According to the Pew Research Center, Massachusetts is currently home to 120,000 to 200,000 undocumented immigrants, which accounts for approximately 20% of the immigrants in the state. Some Massachusetts residents who are immigrants are allowed to apply for a driver’s license or permit because they are not able to provide a Social Security number or immigrant status, but many immigrants need to drive in order to work, due to lack of access to public transportation. Without a driver’s license, one cannot obtain automobile insurance, which does not help the “legal” party if an accident occurs. An Act relative to safe driving would allow all Massachusetts residents to become trained, licensed, and insured to drive without the necessity to be eligible for a Social Security number or proof immigrant status, making roads safer for every driver.

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

■ Elevator Speech
My name is Taiseer Rahman and I, along with my colleagues Ryan Tettemer and Jordan Buscetto, are students at Brandeis University and are volunteering with MIRA coalition and we’re here to talk about an essential public safety issue. There are approximately 150,000 people in Massachusetts living here without authorization who do not have the opportunity to obtain a license because they are unable to get a Social Security number. These residents contributed $201,369,000 in state and local taxes by working jobs to provide for their families. However, they have to do so without proper training, driver’s licenses and insurance. Without proper training, drivers are five times more likely to get into a fatal car accident, as we saw in the deaths of Richard Grossi in 2009 and Matthew Denice in 2011. That is why we implore you to support bill H 2985: An Act relative to safe driving, which would improve public safety by making driving school and appropriate license testing accessible to all of those in the Commonwealth.


**Letter to the Legislator**

My name is Taiseer Rahman and I, along with my colleagues Ryan Tettemer and Jordan Buscetto, are students at Brandeis University, and residents of Waltham. I am writing to you because I am concerned about a serious public safety hazard and national security. In light of what has happened in Massachusetts in the past few years, this issue is more urgent than ever. Car accidents are not always preventable, but the rate of incidents will decrease as people are getting the proper education and opportunity for licensing. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that unlicensed drivers are 5 times more likely to get into a fatal car accident than licensed drivers, as we saw in the deaths of Milford residents Richard Grossi in 2009 and Matthew Denice in 2011. This is why I am writing to you to ask you for your support with House Bill 2985: An Act relative to safe driving. By supporting this bill, you can actually help save lives.

There are approximately 150,000 people in Massachusetts living here without authorization who do not have the opportunity to obtain a license because they are unable to get a Social Security number. Without a license, they are lacking the opportunity to learn this state’s driving laws and are therefore not eligible for insurance. Both of these factors are compounded into a societal danger for everyone: when people who are not able to get a license and yet still drive and get into an automobile accident with a citizen, that affected person is not able to collect insurance. People are still driving without a license in order to provide for their families, so instead of encouraging them to break the law, we should give them the opportunity to cooperate. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that unlicensed drivers are 5 times more likely to get into a fatal car accident than licensed drivers, as we saw in the deaths of Richard Grossi in 2009 and Matthew Denice in 2011. It would be responsible planning to provide an equal opportunity to learn the rules of the road and apply for a license in order to protect our community.

I am an immigrant from Bangladesh and learned that you are an immigrant from Cape Verde. Therefore, we both understand the arduous process that families must go through to obtain a Social Security number and proper immigration status. Unfortunately thousands of immigrants lack the same opportunities that we had but are still working here in the United States to provide for their families and children. This bill would allow these working citizens to drive without the constant fear of being pulled over, and facing punishment for driving without a license and insurance. The police are also in support of this bill as it would allow them to easily identify who they are dealing with, to avoid confusion. Please know that this bill would only grant them permission to drive without any other public benefits like flying or voting rights, so it is strictly a matter of road safety.

Representative Carvalho, I implore you to support the Safe Driving Bill, H.2985, and urge the members of the Joint Transportation Committee to make this bill a priority and vote it out of committee favorably. This bill would allow all residents of Massachusetts to be trained, licensed, and insured drivers.

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**House Ways and Means Script**

My name is Taiseer Rahman and I, along with my colleagues Ryan Tettemer and Jordan Buscetto, are students at Brandeis University and residents of Waltham. I am writing to you because I am concerned about a serious public safety hazard and national security. In light of what has happened in Massachusetts in the past few years, this issue is more urgent than ever. Car accidents are not always preventable, but the rate of incidents will decrease as people are getting the proper education and opportunity for licensing. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that unlicensed drivers are 5 times more likely to get into a fatal car accident than licensed drivers, as we saw in the deaths of Milford residents Richard Grossi in 2009 and Matthew Denice in 2011. This is why I am writing to you to ask you for your support with House Bill 2985: An Act relative to safe driving. By supporting this bill, you can actually help save lives.

There are approximately 150,000 people in Massachusetts living here without authorization and according to a 2016 report by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy they have contributed $201,369,000 in state and local taxes. This means that these residents are driving uninsured and without a license on a daily basis to travel to work and provide for their families. This is because they do not have a Social Security number and proper immigration status. According to the American Action Forum the United States spends approximately $400 billion to $600 billion to deport 11.3 million undocumented immigrants primarily funded (92%) through taxpayer money. However, implementing bill H.2985 would allow undocumented immigrants to receive proper driving education and access to driver’s licenses and insurance, which would raise RMV revenues in Massachusetts by about $15,000,000 (approximation calculated by Massachusetts Immigrants and Refugees Advocacy Coalition). In addition to financial benefits this bill would also ensure public road safety as all drivers would be educated and insured. Even though Massachusetts has a no fault policy in the case of an accident with an uninsured driver, it comes at the cost of higher premium rates for the licensed and insured driver. The police are also in favor of this bill, as it would allow them to correctly identify drivers and pull up their records to assess the threat level they may encounter. As an economist yourself, surely you can see that from an economic standpoint this bill yields overwhelmingly positive results as exemplified by states such as Connecticut, California, Washington D.C, Vermont, etc., who have all enacted similar bills. If we cost-benefit analyze the situation we see that the marginal benefits to society greatly outweigh the costs, as the benefits are not only fiscal, but include preventing the loss of human life as well.
I understand you may be concerned about the practicality of a bill like this, but know that it is not a divisive issue. Everyone wants to prevent the tragedy of car accidents, which take the people of Massachusetts’ lives. Some may be concerned about allowing people in the state without authorization and proper documentation to have the opportunity to get a license because they think that it encourages breaking the law and gives people special benefits that only authorized citizens should have. However, this bill would in fact do the opposite. It would no longer require people to endlessly break the law by driving without a license and the proper knowledge of our road regulations in order to support their families and live their lives.

Chairman Dempsey, I implore you to support the Safe Driving Bill H.2985 and urge the members of the Joint Transportation Committee to make this bill a priority and vote it out of committee favorably. This bill would allow all residents of Massachusetts to be trained, licensed, and insured drivers. Thank you.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jordan

To be completely honest, when I was first learning about bill H.2985, An Act relative to safe driving, I was pessimistic that anything I did would be beneficial toward helping pass this bill. Professor Stimell had prepared us to see this bill fail, as it is extremely controversial and has been advocated for for the past ten years without any success. However, it was extremely encouraging to work with the MIRA (Massachusetts Immigrants and Refugee Advocacy) coalition and to see that our work had actually made a difference. I had participated in many conference calls with their organizers, including Thalita Dias, Maria Alcaraz, and members of other coalitions as well. Many of these calls were directing us on how to advocate for the Safe Driving Bill effectively. Thalita, their field organizer, had actually asked me personally whether I would like to be a team leader for the Immigrants’ Day at the State House on April 11, 2016 and I jumped at the opportunity. Not only would this present my group with a great opportunity to get directly involved with the bill, but it would also allow me to create personal connections with the higher management in MIRA. I have become personally invested in immigrant rights and attempting to subside racial tensions, especially in the wake of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz’ candidacies for president. I never thought that I would want to become involved with an advocacy position, but the passion to help people is one that I share, and I have actually been looking into getting involved with MIRA outside of this course.

Ryan

Immigrants from all over the state visited the State House that day to be a part of something special (Immigrants’ Day). The ceremony began with a children’s choir as they joyfully sang songs about the world and bringing everyone together. I was actually really impressed as the children started to sing in different languages! It was really something special and it brought everyone together as we all cheered for them. Just when you thought things started to settle down, it didn’t. A speaker approached the podium and immediately brought an uproar. He chanted, “Many Voices” and everyone chimed in, “Join for Justice!” It was truly inspirational as people from all over the world came together and were fighting for the same causes. He named countries from all over and no matter where he named, there was either a family or individual there who was representing their country. This was my favorite part because he had 600-700 people chanting and cheering for each and every country he named. It really brought the crowd together as you were able to laugh and smile with the...
strangers next to you. Connections were immediately made with the people around us and friendships were formed. The reason for Immigrants’ Day was to advocate for various pro-immigrant policies, including the Safe Driving Bill. However, as the day progressed, you sensed the feeling it was much more than that to the people there. It brought immigrants and refugees who were all battling with the same struggles, day in and day out, together to advocate their rights as one. It brought a special feeling to Gardner Auditorium to witness hundreds of people come together and fight for what is right. I enjoyed Immigrants’ Day very much as it was a great experience and definitely something I will always remember being a part of.

- **Update**
  On May 2, 2016, the bill was adopted.

- **For more information**
  View the Bill:
  malegislature.gov/Bills/189/House/H2985
  MIRA Coalition:
  www.miracoalition.org