

September 4, 2019

Testimony before the Joint Committee on Transportation on H.3012/S.2061, “An act relative to work and family mobility”

Chairman Boncore, Chairman Straus, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation, my name is Marie-Frances Rivera, President of the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. MassBudget is an independent nonprofit that produces nonpartisan research and analysis focused on policy solutions that improve the lives of low- and middle-income people and the quality of life in Massachusetts. Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important topic.

Evidence shows that granting all drivers access to licenses regardless of their immigration status could help employers access workers, improve the well-being of families, improve public safety, and generate revenue for our state. MassBudget’s new report on this topic examines what this bill could mean for our state and finds that it makes economic sense for workers and businesses, families and law enforcement, and – simply – for all of us.

Our state has long depended on immigrants from around the world to propel our economy and, in our tight labor market, businesses need access to all the qualified workers they can get. This policy would make it easier for people to get to work and would boost the earning potential of immigrant families, thereby increasing economic activity and our state’s revenue.

Undocumented taxpayers contribute \$185 million in state and local taxes annually. Enabling undocumented immigrants to access driver’s licenses and boosting their earning potential would likely increase this amount. In addition, we could see a bump in our state’s revenue through driver’s license fees, vehicle registration fees, inspections, and other fees. Combined, these fees could generate \$6 million in the initial three years of implementation. On top of this, the state would likely see increases in sales tax revenue from car-related purchases.

For law enforcement officials, this bill could help ensure they are able to focus their scarce resources on ensuring our communities are safe rather than spending time questioning and arresting individuals who are otherwise safe drivers but cannot currently obtain licenses. By barring undocumented drivers from obtaining licenses, we make it more time-consuming for officers to conduct traffic stops and make immigrants more fearful of reporting crimes and crashes to police.

Finally, licensing undocumented drivers could benefit each of our pocketbooks. Allowing undocumented drivers to access licenses also helps them access auto insurance. A national study found that this could lower insurance premiums for each of us by about \$20 per year – enough for some flowers for your loved one on Mother’s Day.

At a time when federal policies are making it increasingly difficult for immigrants – documented or not – to live, work, and thrive in this country, our state can take this step to show it welcomes immigrants that are such integral members of our community and drivers of our economy.

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