



Testimony in Support of H7610  
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House Judiciary Committee  
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The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Williams's bill (H7610) that would allow the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue driving privilege licenses/permits to Rhode Islanders who are unable to establish lawful presence in the United States.

As of January 1, 2016 twelve states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted such laws. These include New England states, Connecticut and Vermont, as well as California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Washington<sup>1</sup>. The driving privilege license/permit is not a valid form of ID for voting or other benefits but providing these documents has economic and social benefit to the individuals and to the state.

Undocumented immigrants contribute an estimated total of \$33 million in taxes to Rhode Island, including \$4 million in person income taxes, \$18 million in sales taxes and \$11 million in property taxes (as home owners or renters), according to The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy's Feb. 2016 report, *Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contribution*. Only individuals who have filed tax returns (or are the dependent of such person) for two years prior to applying the driving privilege license/permit would be eligible for a driving privilege license/permit under the proposed law. Allowing our working neighbors to have a driving privilege license/permit will not only ensure they are safe drivers but can promote additional work hours or job changes that can improve the local and state economies.

Our state's driver's license system provides an important public safety function. To gain a license a driver must demonstrate basic knowledge of traffic laws, have good vision and pass a driving test. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that unlicensed drivers are almost 5 times more likely to be in a fatal accident than licensed drivers.<sup>2</sup>

Until the federal government undertakes comprehensive immigration reform and provides pathways to lawful status and/or citizenship for immigrants who have lived and worked in our country for many years, Rhode Island should provide driving privileges to those immigrants who live in our state. This is a common sense step to protect all drivers as well as provide better economic opportunity for Rhode Island residents.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/drivers-license-access-table-2015-07-01.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [High-Risk Drivers fact Sheet](#) (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety).