

HOUSE WAYS & MEANS
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF ADDING PROVISION TO S.2820
GRANTING DRIVERS LICENSE ELIGIBILITY TO UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Chair Michlewitz, Vice-Chair Garlick and members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the Cape Cod Coalition for Safe Communities, I offer testimony **IN SUPPORT** of adding a provision to grant eligibility for undocumented immigrants to obtain the MA standard drivers license.

According to statistics compiled by the Cape Cod Council of Churches, Barnstable County is home to sizable communities of immigrants from Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica and Cape Verde.

Designated as a Neilsen county D, Cape Cod is a rural area and options for public transportation are limited, especially off-season. Immigrants are an important part of the community and are essential to the seasonal economy. For those immigrants who do not have legal status, being ineligible for a driver's license allows for these communities of color to be criminalized.

Therefore we urge you to include language in the reforming police standards legislation that would grant driver's licenses to immigrants without status. We know that for Black immigrants, over-policing has grave consequences as families and communities are torn apart through detention and deportation. We know that for law enforcement this addition would promote trust between communities they serve and allow for officers to consistently identify who's behind the wheel.

There is no doubt that the socially damaging and unsafe linkage of driving privileges to immigration status is a part of the systemic racism that continues to hold back Black communities. There is also no question that law enforcement understands that tested and insured drivers make the roads safer for everyone. That's why the Massachusetts Major City Chiefs of Police Association, several District Attorneys, sheriffs, and individual police Chiefs have endorsed giving driving licenses to immigrants without status. Mobility is necessary.

The work of immigrants without status is especially essential during times of this COVID-19 pandemic. Through the reopening, it is only appropriate that the dignity of their lives also be deemed essential. Whether it is working in healthcare, construction or the food supply chain, we need to protect the health and safety of immigrants who live and work here. The time is now to offer the essential tool of mobility to immigrants who are part of our economic fabric. As we prepare for the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must learn the lessons from the first, and do everything we can to erase racial barriers and halt the criminalization of people of color.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mark Gabriele, Organizer
Cape Cod Coalition for Safe Communities
Orleans, MA



The Cape Cod Coalition for Safe Communities is committed to social justice, fairness, human rights and safety for all members of our communities, regardless of citizenship status. Convened in January 2017, the group is comprised of citizens from many towns on Cape Cod working towards greater civic awareness and engagement on immigration matters, and advocating for just and humane policies.