



March 27, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support of H.F. 1500

Dear Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives:

The Advocates for Human Rights supports H.F. 1500, which will restore access to driver's licenses and state identification to all Minnesota residents. The Advocates for Human Rights is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minnesota that engages volunteers in protecting human rights in our home community and in partnerships around the globe. For more than 35 years The Advocates has represented people fleeing persecution and torture as they seek asylum in the United States. Last year, The Advocates provided free legal assistance in more than 1000 cases, 85% of which were represented by pro bono attorneys.

Things have changed since the 2003 regulatory ban on access to driver's licenses was enacted. Today, the availability of REAL ID-compliant licenses makes the 2003 ban redundant, confusing, and at odds with federal law.¹ More importantly, the 2003 ban excludes some Minnesotans from our communities, resulting in unnecessary anxiety and trauma for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Not only does the 2003 driver's license ban send a message of exclusion, it places a severe and unwarranted burden on people. Witness the experience of one of the clients of The Advocates for Human Rights, as he struggled to retain his driver's license – which he needed to get to medical appointments – even after being granted asylum:

¹ Because of the statutory requirement that the 2003 driver's license ban regulations remain in effect even after the creation of REAL ID-compliant licenses, Minnesota now has two separate and inconsistent lists of which non-citizens qualify for driver's licenses. Minnesota's 2003 ban, enacted prior to the federal REAL ID Act, attempted to identify those non-citizens who are "lawfully present" in the United States. The complexity of federal immigration law and procedures, however, left many people who are "lawfully present" with no way of showing that to DVS agents.

1.	2012	Client files for asylum in the United States.
2.	8/23/2018	Immigration Judge grants asylum. DHS/ICE attorney reserves appeal.
3.	9/23/2018	Immigration Judge's grant of asylum becomes final when DHS/ICE does not appeal, but DHS/ICE fails to send the A-file to USCIS for I-94 processing so no new I-94 card is produced.
4.	10/25/2018	Client goes to USCIS Infopass appointment to inquire with USCIS about the status of his I-94 card. He is told to wait.
5.	11/26/2018	Minnesota DMV issues letter alerting client his driving privileges will be canceled if he does not provide "new or extended residency document, or an INS receipt of application for extension of legal presence document."
6.	12/4/2018	Client goes to a second Infopass appointment to inquire with USCIS. He is told to continue waiting.
7.	12/2018	Client provides copy of immigration judge order as proof of asylum status to DPS/DVS. DVS says he needs an "I-797C, Notice of Action" and does not update status check date.
8.	1/14/2019	Client seeks help from The Advocates for Human Rights. A staff attorney prepares variance request for DVS.
9.	1/15/2019	Client takes variance request to DVS. DVS rejects variance as insufficient and continues to require an I-797C.
10.	1/16/2019	The Advocates staff contacts USCIS to inquire about status of I-94 process. USCIS responds that they do not have the file. They will request it from the ICE Office of Chief Counsel and "take appropriate action" once it is received. New work permit application is submitted based on (a)(5) asylee category.
11.	1/22/19	Client receives notice from USCIS to pick up new I-94 on 1/24/19.
12.	1/24/2019	Although the client is now authorized to work incident to his status as a person granted asylum, the driver's license "status check" date, which was determined on the work permit that was based on his pending asylum claim, means the license is no longer valid. Client is not currently working but needs to drive to doctor appointments.
13.	2/25/19	USCIS approves EAD.

The 2003 driver's license ban will soon exclude several thousand Liberians who have lived in Minnesota under either Temporary Protected Status or Deferred Enforced Departure. First designated for protection in 1991, Liberian DED is scheduled to expire on March 31, leaving those Liberians with "status check" driver's licenses unable to drive.

By passing H.F. 1500, the Minnesota Legislature can make sure that people are not caught in a bureaucratic catch-22.

H.F. 1500 does more than overturn the outdated 2003 driver's license ban. It takes an essential step toward ensuring that all Minnesotans are included in our community. It recognizes that kids should be able to get to the doctor when they are sick, that parents should be able to get to their children's school for conferences, and that families should be able to go to church together. It recognizes that the more than 30,000 children born in Minnesota who live with an undocumented parent have a right to the integrity of their families.

In 2014, The Advocates for Human Rights reported² that immigrants and refugees face barriers to belonging in Minnesota because of discrimination and social distance and that thousands of undocumented Minnesotans and their families live excluded from the community, in constant fear of deportation, and vulnerable to human rights violations.

Minnesota has an obligation to ensure that all people, regardless of where they were born, enjoy safety and security, access to justice, the protection of the family, and the ability to meet their basic needs. We urge you to vote for H.F. 1500.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Phillips". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" and last name "Phillips" clearly distinguishable.

Robin Phillips
Executive Director

² The Advocates for Human Rights, *Moving from Exclusion to Belonging: Immigrant Rights in Minnesota Today*, March 2014, available at TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org/belonging.



April 2nd, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler,
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of the Minnesota Legislature,

We are writing on behalf of undocumented Black immigrants in Minnesota to urge you to support restoring access to driver's licenses for undocumented Minnesotans by voting in favor of HF 1500.

Minnesota is home to a large Black immigrant populations in the United States with over 200,000 living here. We continue to contribute to the economy and cultural landscape of the state- from the Twin Cities, the Metro and to Greater Minnesota. We are business owners, union workers, nurses, doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, janitors, farmers, etc. Most importantly, we are a part of the fabric of Minnesota. This is home for us.

Driver's licenses are important to our undocumented population. Black Minnesotans are 214 times more likely to be pulled over than others due to the over-policing of Black people in the U.S¹. Our point here is that Black immigrants are more likely to be pulled over and placed in deportation proceedings than any other immigrant population. This is why the Black Immigrant Collective supports #freedomtodrive which is campaigning for Driver's Licenses for All legislation in partnership with DFL legislators. While it will not stop profiling, a Driver's License would give our community some freedom to move around with dignity. We are grateful that an anti-discrimination clause exists that will offer some protection to our community.

Black immigrant undocumented communities in Minnesota are putting themselves at risk every time they want to do what most of us take for granted like driving to the grocery store. The passage of this bill will allow many in our communities to move freely without

¹ Montgomery, David, and David Montgomery. "Data Dive: Racial Disparities in Minnesota Traffic Stops." *Twin Cities*, Twin Cities, 9 July 2016, www.twincities.com/2016/07/08/data-dive-racial-disparities-in-minnesota-traffic-stops/.

fear. Aside from the obvious economic reasons to support access to driver licenses, this is really about the humanity of our communities.

We urge you to support this legislation and allow our undocumented Minnesota the free to drive.

Sincerely,

Co-founders: Abena Abraham, Denise Butler, Alfreda Daniels, Mustafa Jumale, Nelima Sitati-Munene, Nekessa Opoti and Wynfred Russell

On behalf of the Black Immigrant Collective



CENTRO DE TRABAJADORES UNIDOS EN LUCHA

3715 Chicago Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55406

612-332-0663

CTUL

3715 Chicago Ave

Minneapolis, MN 55407

March 28, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives

c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler,

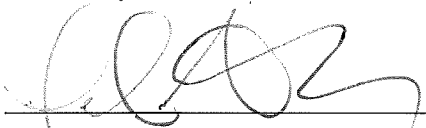
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

St. Paul, MN 55155

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives:

We are writing you from the Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL) together with a group of coalitions in the Twin Cities and of greater Minnesota to ask that you support HF1500, more commonly referred to as the MN Freedom to Drive bill. CTUL is a workers' center that organizes for fair wages and working conditions for all workers in the Twin Cities. HF1500 will help Minnesota residents without licenses have the freedom to drive to work, to stores, and drive their children to school. CTUL strongly believes that members at CTUL will also be positively impacted by this bill. A lot of workers are often faced with situations that could easily be remediated if they only had a MN driver's license to help with their everyday needs. Many will be able to confidently drive to their jobs without fear of being detained by police and penalized with tickets simply for going about their lives and supporting the needs of their families. Thank you for your time and consideration in supporting this bill.

Sincerely,



CTUL

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

*Department of Chicano & Latino
Studies
College of Liberal Arts*

*19 Scott Hall
72 Pleasant St. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455*

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March 27, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St Paul, MN 55155

Esteemed Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives

We write with great urgency in support of the passing of HF1500 (driver licenses for all). As scholars who research immigration, education, labor, and housing rights we see this bill as an important step towards social justice for Minnesota residents.

To date, roughly 82,000 people in the state of Minnesota are eligible for state IDs or driver licenses but cannot obtain one under the state's present conditions. Prior to 2003, undocumented Minnesota residents, many of whom have lived in the state for decades, were able to receive valid state IDs and driver licenses. For over fifteen years, since this policy change, Minnesota residents have been denied proper identification.

Access to driver licenses is a public safety issue. Already twelve states and the District of Columbia have passed similar legislation. Having a valid driver license contributes to everyone's public safety. All residents' quality of life improves when everyone knows the rules of the road and traffic regulations.

Licensed drivers contribute to Minnesota's economy. For many Minnesota residents driving is not a choice, but one of necessity. Having a valid license would ensure Minnesota residents the safe access to their employment sites. It would also enhance the economic access for other family members, often who live in "mixed-status" households, who rely on other members for transportation. Moreover, Minnesota would see an increase in state revenue from the application fee.

Most importantly, driver licenses for all builds stronger Minnesota communities. While this bill directly impacts undocumented Minnesota residents, it also supports the elderly and homeless. When everyone in our state has access to driver licenses, people are able to be more mobile and build deeper relationships with their broader community. Our social fabric strengthens when everyone has access to travel to attend and participate in the cultural, educational, and employment opportunities within our state.

We urge you to pass this important legislation for all Minnesota residents.

Sincerely,
The Department of Chicano and Latino Studies

Karen Mary Davalos, PhD (Department Chair)

Jimmy Patiño, PhD

Gabriela Spears-Rico, PhD

Bianet Castellanos, PhD

Edén Torres, PhD

Jessica Lopez Lyman, PhD



April 4, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives
C/O Majority Leaders Ryan Winkler
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of Minnesota Legislature:

The African Career, Education and Resource, Inc. (ACER) is a nonprofit organization that engages African immigrants living in Minnesota to advance equity for the African community. ACER works with an engaged base of hundreds of community members to develop innovative policy and practice solutions to eliminate the well-documented disparities in education, employment, health, housing, and wealth that affect African immigrants and other people of color.

We are called as advocates and as Americans to welcome our neighbors, and so we call on you as our representatives to support Driver's Licenses for undocumented immigrants as a matter of public safety and economic growth.

We call on members to oppose legislation that would restrict or halt the movement of refugees and immigrants. Our country has a long history of welcoming immigrants, and we cannot limit the mobility of those trying to make a living for themselves and families.

Additionally, we call on members to explicitly call out and reject hateful rhetoric that would demonize immigrants and refugees. Such rhetoric cannot simply be dismissed as just words—it has real consequences. It inflames and encourages hostile responses and even violence against immigrants and refugees, and it creates a climate of fear, mistrust, and anger that paralyzes attempts to promote and pass policies that would help our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters prosper.

We are called as advocates and Americans to remember that we are a nation of immigrants, and that our history of welcoming immigrants and refugees is precisely what has made us strong as a state and nation, and a symbol of freedom to the rest of the world. We ask you as our representatives to uphold these values and ask you to please support Driver's License for immigrants.

Sincerely yours,

Wynfred Russell
Co-Founder & Director, Strategic Partnerships

IMMIGRANT
LAW CENTER
— of MINNESOTA —



*Supporting families and strengthening
communities for more than 20 years*

March 26, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler,
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives:

I am writing this letter in support of HF 1500, the Driver's Licenses for All bill introduced by Majority Leader Ryan Winkler. I strongly believe that all Minnesotans should have the ability to apply for state driver's licenses and identity documents regardless of immigration status.

Before 2003, all Minnesota residents had access to state-issued driver's licenses. A change in law implemented by then-Governor Tim Pawlenty made driver's licenses out of reach for immigrants unable to prove valid immigration status.

As an immigration legal services provider, I am acutely aware of the precarious environment in which immigrants currently live. While immigration policies continue to change at the federal level, many of our Minnesota neighbors are in danger of losing their status at a time when, according to court records, statewide ICE apprehensions have increased by 67 percent. This means that an immigrant's encounter with law enforcement for something as mundane as a burned out tail light could begin a perilous journey that could end up in their removal from the United States and the break-up of their family, and the loss of their homes and their livelihoods.

Our immigrant neighbors have become integral to the fabric of our communities. Of the 95,000 undocumented immigrants in Minnesota, more than half have lived in the state for more than a decade. In that time, they have established deep roots in the state and have become intrinsic members of their communities. Many of these individuals are the parents of U.S.-citizen children whom they need to drive to school and to doctor's appointments. The uncertainty in which many children find themselves can lead to stress and life-long trauma.

Supporting HF 1500 would bolster public safety. By requiring all Minnesota drivers to pass a driving test and to obtain auto insurance, we would ensure safer roads for all and decrease auto insurance premiums. Further, law enforcement agents and first responders would be able to identify people during the course of their duties, during which, sometimes seconds count.

Again, I urge you to support HF 1500. It is time that Minnesota joins 12 other states and the District of Columbia in providing this vital document for our neighbors.

Sincerely,

Lenore Millibergity
Interim Executive Director
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota



Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler,
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re.: HF 1500 Drivers License and Identification Card Requirements

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives:

Communities Organizing Power and Action for Latinos (COPAL), write in to support HF1500. Regaining access to a driver's license after the law changed in 2003 remains a struggle for building a just and inclusive Minnesota.

Passing legislation to allow members of our communities to drive will impact thousands of Minnesotan families, especially children. Some benefits are:

- Increase wealth earning by accessing better-paying jobs. Also, this has a positive effect on the economy of the state of Minnesota through tax collections.
- Increase the road's safety.
- Increase parents' ability to bring their children to extra-curricular activities.
- Increase security by developing stronger relationships between community and police departments
- And first and foremost, changing the law move us forward to the building an equitable state of Minnesota that values the contribution and lives of every member of the society.

Several sectors of the society, from law enforcement to the chambers of commerce and advocates have agreed that the current driver's license policy only hurts families and the state of Minnesota. It is time to change the state's law. It is an act of affirmation and human dignity.

Thank you for your consideration and your services to every person in Minnesota.

Respectfully yours,


Francisco Segovia, Executive Director
COPAL



To: The Honorable Members of the Minnesota Senate and House of Representatives

From: Asamblea de Derechos Civiles

Re: The Freedom to Drive Minnesota (Driver's Licenses for all) Bill

Dear Representatives:

We are Asamblea de Derechos Civiles de Minnesota (Minnesota Assembly for Civil Rights) and we support the Freedom to Drive Minnesota Bill.

Asamblea is a statewide, faith-based, non-profit organization which organizes immigrants from predominantly Latino congregations to build power for changes in the immigration system and the underlying political and economic structures behind it. As such, we support the Freedom to Drive Bill for many reasons:

First, the bill will improve the lives of the people we represent. Hard working, undocumented Minnesotans cannot have access to a test to obtain driver's license, but must still get to work, attend to the needs of our children and participate in our community's activities.

Second, we, hard working Minnesotans contribute to the state through our work, and through the taxes we pay. Like other Minnesotans, our taxes go to creating a stronger state infrastructure. It only makes sense that we should benefit from the improvements made to our roads and bridges through our taxes.

Third, giving us the opportunity to earn a driver's license will make our state safer by ensuring that all people driving have been adequately trained and tested.

Fourth, licensing more drivers means a boost to our economy. More licensed drivers means more money in the state coffers, more money to insurance agencies and more money to car dealerships.

Fifth, licensing undocumented Minnesotans means improving the productivity of the farms and companies for whom we work. Our employers support our desire for driver's licenses so that we can be at work on time and without impediments to our labor.

Finally, giving us the opportunity to earn a driver's license is the moral thing to do. We are hard working members of this community and we deserve the dignity that accompanies a driver's license.

For those who are concerned that we might use a driver's license to attempt to vote, we firmly declare that will not happen. We readily accept the restriction proposed in the bill that would clearly state, on the license, "Not eligible for voting."

Furthermore, undocumented Minnesotans do not wish to remain undocumented. Asamblea is working hard to change immigration laws give us a clear path to citizenship. We would never jeopardize that path by trying to vote. We are fully aware that such an action would deny us the right to citizenship forever.

Thank you for your time. Please support us in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

La Asamblea de Derechos Civiles

ASIAN AMERICAN ORGANIZING PROJECT

1537 Glenwood Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55405
612.377.2561 | aaopmn.org

April 4, 2019

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
St. Paul MN 55155

Members of the House of Representatives,

Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP) supports drivers' licenses for all people, regardless of immigration status, and urges Representatives to support this cause.

Minnesota is home to a fast-growing Asian American population. In fact, Asian Americans are the fastest growing demographic among other racial groups in Minnesota. According to the Migration Policy Institute, over 18,000 of our Asian American community without a pathway to citizenship.

In Minnesota, one needs a car to simply pick up their children from school, or get groceries from the store, or respond to a family emergency. Driving is a necessity, not a choice. Drivers' licenses would ensure that our community members are driving safely and keeping others on the road safe. Drivers licenses enables sole providers for their families to access economic opportunities that support the necessities of raising a family. It allows our community members to engage with and contribute to the local economy, as people can access grocery stores, laundromats, and other businesses more easily with drivers' licenses. Lastly, and most importantly, Drivers' Licenses for All would ensure that our community members can move about with ease and dignity, and go about their daily lives without fear.

We urge you to support Drivers' Licenses for All to uphold public safety, economic growth, and dignity. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Asian American Organizing Project

4/2/2019

Dear Members of the House of Representatives,

Women's March Minnesota strongly supports HF 1500 - The License Access and Public Safety Act.

Before 2003, residents of Minnesota could obtain driver's licenses regardless of immigration status. We implore you to return this privilege to people who have lived in Minnesota for decades and ask that you extend it to those who are recent residents.

Approximately 82,000 residents of Minnesota are eligible for a driver's license but cannot get one because they are undocumented immigrants. Many of these 82,000 Minnesota residents have family here including US born children, so this law can benefit hundreds of thousands.

We have heard stories from mothers who could not take their children to doctor's appointments or emergency rooms as public transportation continues to be insufficient or unavailable in most of Minnesota. There are multiple stories from women business owners who have lost customers because of lack of transportation. Young drivers tell us they are unable to move to attend college because they are their family's source of transportation.

Women's March Minnesota recognizes the value to our state when every driver receives training, passes a driver's test and purchases car insurance. The 12 states and District of Columbia that already allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses have seen these benefits.

We urge the Minnesota House to vote yes regarding HF 1500 - The License Access and Public Safety Act.

Sincerely,

Alicia Donahue, Vice Chair and Co-Founder, on behalf of the Board of Directors



Alicia Donahue
Vice Chair, Board Member & Co-Founder
Women's March Minnesota
m: 763-843-6097
w : www.WomensMarchMN.com
e : alicia@womensmarchmn.com





Indigenous Roots
788 E 7th Street
Saint Paul, MN 55106

March 22, 2019

Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler,
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Esteemed Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives:

As the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Indigenous Roots as well as a former undocumented immigrant, I know from personal experience the importance of obtaining a government issued identification card and driver's license. There is sufficient evidence that suggest licensing unauthorized immigrants will make the roads safer, lower insurance premiums, help stimulate local economies and provide stability for families.

Many artists, community members and families of Indigenous Roots are directly affected by this issue. Your support would greatly benefit thousands of your constituents locally and inspire other states nationally to address this issue within their own communities.

Sincerely,

Sergio Quiroz

Indigenous Roots
788 E 7th Street Saint Paul, MN 55106
651.395.7145 | info@indigenous-roots.org
<https://indigenous-roots.org/>



**MINNESOTA
BUDGET
PROJECT**

An initiative of
the Minnesota Council
of Nonprofits

Members of the House of Representatives
c/o Majority Leader Ryan Winkler
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 27, 2019

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives,

The Minnesota Budget Project urges you to support House File 1500, which would allow Minnesotans to access driver's licenses regardless of their immigration status. It is critical to acknowledge and support the immigrants who call Minnesota their home and are working, learning, and living in our communities

For a large number of Minnesotans, the daily activities we do to support our families - like getting to work safely, dropping children off at school, or buying groceries - requires driving. Without access to driver's licenses, for about 95,000 Minnesotans doing these basic activities can result in potentially life-altering consequences, including families being separated and community members losing their livelihoods.

This is a time when Minnesota is increasingly relying on all members of our communities to fill critical jobs, and having a driver's license can open a door to greater economic opportunity. With a driver's license, these community members are able to reliably get to their jobs, and have more flexibility for scheduling and broadened job opportunities. When these Minnesotans are able to increase their earnings, that also creates a boost in consumer spending that's good for our local economies.

Please support House File 1500 so our immigrant neighbors can more fully and safely participate in our communities and the state's economy.

Respectfully,

Nan Madden
Minnesota Budget Project Director

Northfield, March 27th, 2019

To the Members of the Minnesota Legislature,

On March 14th, 2019, the Northfield Human Rights Commission approved unanimously a motion to present a resolution of support of the driver's licenses for all to the Northfield City Council. On April 2nd, 2019, the Northfield City Council will vote on a resolution in support of the bill that will restore the access of all Minnesotans to obtain a driver's license.

The resolution at the Human Rights Commission followed several key points in this discussion:

- It is time to restore the driver's licenses for all Minnesotans. The reasons given in 2003, to increase the security of people in the state, following the terrorists attack of 9 11, have proven not beneficial for the state.
- In rural areas such as Northfield, people depend heavily on their cars to run basic errands and even without driver's licenses people drive. In many cases drivers have car insurance but no driver's licenses.
- Access to driver's licenses for everybody in the state will create safer roads for all Minnesotans. New Mexico passed a similar law and there was an increment of 24% of insured motorists.
- We cannot fix the immigration issues at the federal level but as states we have ways to make changes that will address major disparities and injustices committed against immigrants.
- We should care equally for everybody regardless of their immigration status, country of origin, religion, creed, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or disability.

We hope this is the year that a more than a decade long demand from many groups across many different communities in the state is finally met and driver's licenses will again be issued to all Minnesotans as it was before 2003.

Respectfully,

Northfield Human Rights Commission

Chair: Mar Valdecantos, Vice Chair: Justin London, Secretary: Angelique Dietz, Commissioners: Richard DeBeau, Larry Fowler, Rigoberto Lazaro, Jill Watson, Shafqat Iqbal, Lucy Gonzalez Miron, Jean Hepburn, Freweyni Kaleab, Enrique Reyes Dominguez, Lisa Moore, Youth Commissioners: Isaac Riggins, Keara Cooney and Chloe Thomas-Green.



VECINXS UNIDXS/NEIGHBORS UNITED

“Neighbors United works to bring visibility and empowerment to the immigrant and refugee communities in the Northfield area.”

www.neighborsunitedofnorthfield.org

Northfield, March 23rd, 2019

As Rice County Neighbors United of Northfield, our work revolves around helping marginalized communities within the greater Northfield community. A town close enough to the Twin Cities to be familiar with urban life but far enough that it is rural and often feels isolated and insular. Within the larger community there are pockets of immigrants, low income people and people of color striving to thrive in a mostly white middle class town.

Neighbors United is led by immigrants from different countries. As part of our work we know how important it is to be able to have access to jobs and opportunities and contribute to the local economy. But the simple action to drive a car to a job place or buy groceries is for many of our neighbors a complicated proposition.

Before the terrorists attacks of 9 11 everybody in Minnesota was able to drive a car with a driving license. After 9 11, and the country's push to strengthen people's security undocumented immigrants cease to have access to driving licenses. Many great policies were enacted after the worst terrorist attacks in this country's modern history such as not allowing the airplanes cockpit doors to be accessible to passengers. The Pawlenty executive order in 2003, on the other hand, was a policy that did more harm than good by putting an end to driving licenses for all.

Legislators probably thought at the time that the move was necessary and yet didn't account for the many people that need to drive around the state to work, buy essentials, take care of sick family members or take children to their schools or activities. Perhaps they thought they wouldn't drive anymore. The reality is that people continued to drive, especially in rural areas like Northfield where public transit is almost nonexistent. They continued to drive and developed an even deeper distrust and fear of the police. Many drivers still carry the expired licenses in their wallets.

The argument to wait for the federal level to fix the immigration laws and really acknowledge the many people needed to sustain the US economy is not a valid one. We've been waiting decades for a change that never seems to come. The result is a large number of drivers without driving licenses in the Minnesota roads making everybody less safe. States around the country are taking matters into their own hands and doing what the federal government is not capable of doing yet. States are granting driving licenses back to all its residents, twelve states have done it already.

Minnesota could become soon another state to allow everybody to obtain a driver's license. It is a matter to acknowledge that immigrants are part of the economy, work, consume, pay taxes and drive. Having everybody on the road with a driving license and car insurance is a benefit to everybody. Safe roads are much needed in the instances of a crash. Many undocumented immigrants drive with car insurance even without driving licenses. They also want to be safe on the road.

Hopefully soon everybody will be able to drive with a driver's license as the bill proposed, HF1500 makes its way through the House and does the same with the Senate. A law allowing everybody to obtain a driving license will bring peace of mind for all drivers and people in Minnesota.

Neighbors United supports the driver licenses for all campaign and proposed bill and hopes this is the year it is finally signed into law. It's been over sixteen years of a fight to restore driving licenses for all. It is time Minnesota implements again common sense policies for the benefit of all residents in the state.

Contact: Director Mar Valdecantos, 507 301 8646.