



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

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and

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON ELECTION LAWS

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TESTIMONY FROM 192nd SESSION

June 23, 2021

The Honorable William M. Straus
House Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation
State House, Room 134
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Joseph A. Boncore
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation
State House, Room 112
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Honorable Chairs,

I write to you in support of **S.2289/H.3456, *An Act Relative to Work and Family Mobility***, and respectfully request that the committee report the bill favorably. Last session, this legislation made it through the Transportation Committee.

I feel compelled to testify on this bill on behalf of my immigrants constituents, the public safety of all residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and as the lead sponsor of the Safe Communities Act. The Work and Family Mobility bill would enable immigrants to apply for a driver's license or ID card while keeping Massachusetts in full compliance with REAL ID requirements. Both bills highlight the importance of avoiding immigrant vulnerability for deportation in the court system.

Today, I would like to highlight the potential benefits in the Work and Family Mobility Act. First, we all benefit when we drive knowing that everyone behind a wheel is a licensed driver. We all benefit when no one is in fear of calling 911 for the police department, fire department, or EMS services.

Specifically, immigrant communities have a strong presence in my district. Throughout my time as the State Senator of the Middlesex and Worcester district, I regularly visit many Brazilian churches. I have found that every visit, problems with driver's licenses come up, with urgent request for the Legislature to address this problem. In the district that I represent, driving plays a crucial part in mobility in most if not all areas of my district, which has few public transportation options for local travel. My immigrant constituents are running the risk of getting pulled over for driving without a license. They run the risk of being punished for completing simple daily tasks like getting to work, taking their children to the doctor, or buying groceries.

Many occupations require the use of a car. Those who are babysitters or caregivers are expected to safely pick up/drop off children from school, bring children to after school programs, bring children/elders to regular appointments, pick up medications, etc. They are required to do so safely. With a standard license, they do not need to fear when they complete tasks that will provide for their families.

I have met with families where a husband or father has been deported, forever ripped apart. Often, that constituent's first step in being deported comes from being arrested for driving without a license. Many police officers do not want to do this, but feel that they have no other choice, given our current state laws. After those constituents were arrested, ICE agents would pick up that person at home, or when the person goes to court. The Work and Family Mobility Act plays a critical part in preventing immigrants from being brought into the court system, making them vulnerable for deportation for simply following their everyday routine.

Immigrants who are currently barred from driving are a vital part of Massachusetts' social and economic fabric. An estimated 185,000 immigrants without status lived in Massachusetts as of 2016 –roughly one-fifth of the immigrant population. Many live in mixed-status families; about 1 in 20 U.S. citizen children in our Commonwealth live with at least one undocumented family member. In 2016, undocumented immigrants contributed \$8.8 billion to the Massachusetts economy, and they paid an estimated \$184.6 million in state and local taxes.

As the Legislature continues to consider legislation that would have a direct impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of immigrants across Massachusetts, I ask that the Joint Committee on Transportation give Senate Bill S.2289/H.3456 favorable reports. Thank you very much for your strong consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jamie B. Eldridge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Eldridge
State Senator
Middlesex & Worcester