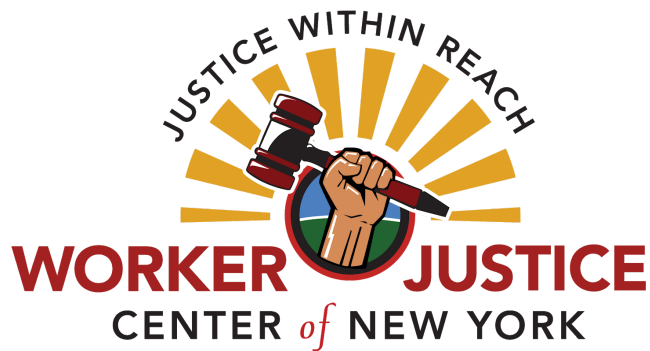


**LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARINGS  
ON THE 2019-2020 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL**

Testimony before the New York State Senate Finance Committee  
and  
The New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee  
on the Transportation Budget

**Emma Kreyche  
Senior Organizing and Advocacy Coordinator,  
Worker Justice Center of New York**

Representing the Green Light NY: Driving Together Coalition



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## **Green Light NY: Restoring Driver's License Access, Regardless of Immigration Status**

The Green Light NY: Driving Together Coalition includes dozens of grassroots community organizations and advocacy groups from across New York State that have come together with the aim of restoring equal access to driver's licenses for all residents of our state, regardless of immigration status. Last year, our coalition introduced the "Driver's License Access and Privacy Act" (reintroduced this year in the Senate as S1747), which would permit all qualified New Yorkers to apply for a Standard Driver's License under the state's new REAL ID compliant licensing system. Twelve other states, in addition to Washington DC and Puerto Rico, currently permit undocumented residents to obtain driver's licenses and several more states are poised to adopt similar policies. It is long past time for New York to amend our vehicle and traffic law to provide the opportunity for all immigrants--regardless of status--to learn the rules of the road, obtain a license, and properly register and insure their vehicles in this state. The proposed Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2020, however, is silent on this matter.

### **Budget action items associated with REAL ID conversion should be tied to new provisions for expanded access to Standard Licenses.**

In the fall of 2017, the Department of Motor Vehicles released its plan for New York to become fully compliant with the Federal REAL ID Act by October of 2020. The plan involved the creation of a multi-tiered licensing system that includes an Enhanced Driver's License, a new REAL ID License, and Standard License. Both the Enhanced and REAL ID Licenses can be used for federal purposes, while the Standard License is clearly marked "NOT FOR FEDERAL PURPOSES" and cannot be used to board an airplane or enter federal buildings. It is this Standard License that New York can and should offer to undocumented residents of our state who are otherwise qualified. Under this proposal, all applicants--regardless of immigration status--would have to provide valid proof of New York residence consistent with the DMV's current regulations. Budget actions for the upcoming fiscal year include funding for the the second year of the license renewal cycle and the implementation of programmatic mandates that will make New York REAL ID compliant by the October 2020 deadline. There there is no better time for the state to begin implementing the provisions of the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act as a component of this broader license redesign program. If approached in this manner, the implementation costs associated with expanding access to Standard Licenses would be minimal and entirely offset by the revenue it will generate.

### **The Driver's License Access and Privacy Act would generate sufficient revenues as to easily outweigh costs.**

According to a 2017 study conducted by the Fiscal Policy Institute<sup>1</sup>, our proposed bill would lead to approximately 265,000 newly licensed New York drivers. Based on this estimate, New York

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<sup>1</sup> David Dyssegaard Kallick and Cyierra Roldan, "Expanding Access to Driver's Licenses Getting a License Without Regard to Immigration Status," Fiscal Policy Institute, January 31, 2017. All research cited in this testimony is available for download at: <https://greenlightnewyork.org/research/>

State would receive \$24 million in one-time revenue from license plate and title fees and \$28 million in annual revenue from car registration fees combined with gas and sales taxes. FPI also projects the measure will generate another \$8.6 million in annual revenues and \$2.2 million in one-time revenue for the MTA from surcharges on car registration, gas tax, and sales tax, and driver's licenses within the greater metropolitan area. Upstate mass transportation authorities and county governments would also stand to gain. With more people obtaining licenses and purchasing vehicles in New York State, we expect a total of \$57 million in combined annual government revenues and \$26 million in one-time revenues.

**Besides generating revenue for the state, expanding Driver's License access would stimulate the economy and strengthen our workforce.**

The economic benefits of expanding license access are many. More licensed drivers will lead to more car sales and greater mobility among our state's rural and suburban immigrant workforce. Workers and employers alike will benefit from overcoming transportation barriers that contribute to labor shortages in some of our state's most important economic sectors, particularly agriculture. A 2018 study conducted by researchers at SUNY Geneseo<sup>2</sup>, for example, found that lack of basic mobility among immigrant farmworkers creates "significant challenges to their health and well-being," both physical and mental. However, immigrant workers and employers are not the only New Yorkers who would benefit from this policy change.

**All New Yorkers would benefit from improved traffic safety and lower car insurance rates.**

Licensing unauthorized immigrant drivers ensures they will be informed of traffic laws, pass a driving test, and operate a registered and insured vehicle. Since New Mexico changed its policy in 2003, the state's rate of uninsured motorists fell from 33% to under 9%. Upon implementing a similar measure, California saw a 10% reduction in the annual number of hit-and-run accidents, saving not-at-fault drivers \$3.5 million in out-of-pocket property damage expenses.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, insurance rates in states that allow unauthorized immigrants are moderately lower than those that do not -- averaging \$17 less on an annual basis.<sup>4</sup> Expanding access to licenses is a practical way to improve public safety and strengthen trust between immigrant communities and police. With valid, legal identification, police will be able to verify the identity of motorists and review their traffic records in the DMV system, allowing them to fulfill their duties more efficiently and effectively. Witnesses and victims of crimes will more readily seek out and cooperate with police.

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Guzman and Melanie Medeiros, "Immigrant Farmworker Immobility & Health: The Need for Driver Licenses for All, Findings from a SUNY Geneseo Qualitative Research Study," 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Lueders, Jens Hainmueller and Duncan Lawrence, "Providing driver's licenses to unauthorized immigrants in California improves traffic safety," PNAS, April 18, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Mauricio Cáceres and Kenneth P. Jameson, "The Effects on Insurance Costs of Restricting Undocumented Immigrants' Access to Driver Licenses," Southern Economic Journal, 2015, vol. 81, number 4.

**We owe it to the immigrants who live and work among us to help improve their quality of life by ensuring access to basic amenities and encouraging full participation in community life.**

Picking up a sick child from school, attending a parent-teacher conference, purchasing groceries, traveling to a doctor's appointment, attending a religious service, or simply commuting to work each day; throughout most of New York State, these daily activities are nearly impossible without access to a vehicle. Yet there are some 752,000<sup>5</sup> immigrant New Yorkers age 16 and over who are currently ineligible to become licensed drivers--all because of our broken federal immigration system. These New Yorkers contribute an estimated \$1.1 billion in New York State and local taxes.<sup>6</sup> They are our neighbors, our classmates, our friends, and our colleagues.

**As a state that prides itself on welcoming immigrants, New York lawmakers must do all you can to act as a bulwark against federal policies that persecute immigrants and asylum seekers, unjustly separate families, and devalue the contributions of immigrant workers--especially the undocumented.**

Nationally, traffic offenses ranked third most common on the list of criminal offenses associated with ICE arrests for the 2018 fiscal year.<sup>7</sup> Particularly along New York's northern border, local police routinely contact federal immigration officials after pulling over unlicensed operators, regardless of how minor the traffic violation. There is simply no reason to continue allowing hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers to live in fear that a routine traffic stop will result in arrest or deportation. The Worker Justice Center of New York and the fellow member organizations of Green Light NY: Driving Together Coalition bear witness daily to the devastating impact that lack of access to driver's licenses has on immigrant communities in New York State.

Whether enacted through the budget process or as stand-alone legislation, the time to adopt the provisions of the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act is now. As a matter of public policy, restoring driver's license access to undocumented New Yorkers a win-win all around. And to make these changes coincide with the Department of Motor Vehicles' implementation of REAL ID mandated changes to our licensing system is simply common sense.

***The Worker Justice Center of New York pursue justice for those denied human rights with a focus on agricultural and other low wage workers, through legal representation, community empowerment and advocacy for institutional change. For more information, visit [www.wjcnyc.org](http://www.wjcnyc.org).***

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<sup>5</sup> Kallick and Roldan, "Expanding Access to Driver's Licenses Getting a License Without Regard to Immigration Status."

<sup>6</sup> Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contributions," Washington, D.C., Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, February 24, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> "Fiscal Year 2018 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report," pg. 4.  
<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/about/offices/ero/pdf/eroFY2018Report.pdf>