

Drive SAFE bills will help over 100,000 immigrants get drivers licenses

Passing these bills would bring Michigan law up to speed with that of 16 other states.

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Published: May. 11, 2021 at 6:41 PM UTC | Updated: 14 hours ago



LANSING, Mich. (WILX) - Since 2008, immigrants and undocumented immigrants in Michigan have not been able to obtain a state ID, but now that could change.

The "Drive SAFE plan" (Safety, Access, Freedom, and the Economy) was re-introduced in the Michigan House Tuesday afternoon. Companion bills were introduced in the Michigan Senate earlier this week.

The plan would give those who cannot prove their legal presence in our country the opportunity to obtain a driver's license or state identification card.

"Everyone deserves to be able to care for their families," Tom Hickson said, Vice President for Public Policy and Advocacy with the Michigan Catholic Conference. "In a state that is known as the home of the Motor City, you really need to drive to do that."

Bills 433 and 434 would give drivers' licenses and state ID cards to over 100,000 immigrants.

"Immigrants are business owners, parents, they are professionals, they're essential workers, and caregivers," District 41 State Representative Padma Kuppa said. "Allowing them access to a driver's license means they can fulfill their responsibilities."

Not only has this been seen as an economic issue, but also a safety issue.

"Denying nearly 100,000 people the ability to obtain a driver's license increases the risk of auto accidents because of a lack of knowledge of rules on the road," Hickson said. "It also increases insurance costs for the rest of us."

It's a health issue too, especially during a time where vaccines are needed to stop the on going coronavirus pandemic.

"There were a lot of people in our community who were not able to access a COVID test," Nelly Fuentes said, an immigrant from Michigan. "There's still people who have questions about accessing a COVID vaccine because of the lack of a drivers license."

Legislature feels this plan would not only help all sectors of the economy but law enforcement too.

"It's very important when a police officer stops somebody, that they know who they're talking to," Ted Nelson said, former Michigan State Police Detective Sergeant and member of Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). "Without proper identification, police are then forced to try to figure out who these people are, whether they're wanted or not, whether they can drive in Michigan, and it takes up a lot of time and resources."

Passing these bills would bring Michigan law up to speed with that of 16 other states, including Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico.

"This policy does not grant any undocumented person the ability to vote, or otherwise obtain the privilege of U.S. citizenship. These bills however represent one small but very powerful step that will increase safety on our roads and protect Michigan's citizens."

Illegal immigrants are not the only ones who would benefit from these bills, but also DACA recipients, citizens born abroad, and foreign adoptees.

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