



Public Testimony
House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 5686
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Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

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The RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty is a diverse coalition of religious communities and advocacy partners throughout the state who have come together to fight poverty. We are writing to express our strong support for **House Bill 5686** which would allow qualified undocumented immigrants to obtain drivers' licenses.

As you consider the bill before you, we ask that you consider several points:

- First, licensing all drivers is **positively correlated with a reduction in states' poverty rates**. Recent analysis by the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University notes, "In the case of poverty, we found that on average poverty is higher among states without restrictions than in the states with restrictions. Overall poverty tends to go down in states and years without restrictions and goes up in states and years with restrictions."¹
- Second, licensing all drivers **helps increase traffic safety for everyone**. Unlicensed drivers, nationwide, are five times likelier to be involved in a fatal crash than licensed drivers, based on data provided by AAA Foundation.² Undocumented Rhode Islanders, like all other drivers, would need to pass a driving test to get a license, ensuring that unfit drivers are kept off the roads.
- Third, **numerous other states have already successfully implemented** such reforms. Twelve states and DC all provide access to drivers' licenses or their equivalent to undocumented state residents. California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Vermont, Washington (state), and Washington, D.C., have all paved the way for Rhode Island.³
- Finally, and most significantly, from our standpoint, it is the **morally right** course of action. Across our varied and divergent faith traditions certain common themes echo consistently. Prominent among these religious themes is the call to hospitality. We are invited to love the stranger (for we were strangers, too!) and to do for others as we would have them do unto us.

Both faith and facts have moved us to be here today to strongly support this bill. We are asking for the committee's support, as well, in moving this bill forward.

Thank you for your public service and for your consideration of this important question.

¹ Latin Policy Institute, "A Legal and Policy Analysis of Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Rhode Islanders," page 23, http://www.rwu.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/lpi/drivers-license_report-legal.pdf

² AAA Foundation, "High-Risk Drivers Fact Sheet," <https://www.aaafoundation.org/sites/default/files/DDFS.pdf>.

³ Updated data available at <https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/drivers-license-access-table.pdf>.

Original source: The Pew Charitable Trusts, "Deciding Who Drives: State choices surrounding unauthorized immigrants and driver's licenses," August 2015, <http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2015/08/deciding-who-drives.pdf>;