

February 17, 2011

**MISSION**

OneAmerica advances the fundamental principles of democracy and justice at the local, state and national levels by building power within immigrant communities in collaboration with key allies.

**Testimony on Behalf of OneAmerica in Opposition to HB1577  
House Transportation Committee**

Distinguished Members of the House Transportation Committee,

On behalf of OneAmerica and its members, we submit the following testimony in strong opposition to HB1577.

A member-based organization and the largest immigrant advocacy organization in the state, OneAmerica's mission is to advance the fundamental principles of democracy and justice through building power in immigrant communities, in collaboration with key allies. Our members are active in community base groups across Washington State, including in Mt. Vernon, White Center/Burien, Tacoma, Vancouver, Kent, Walla Walla, Tri-Cities, Yakima, and other cities. HB1577 threatens the social, civic and economic opportunities of many immigrant communities.

By restricting access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrant taxpayers, we believe HB1577 would undermine public safety by creating a new group of unlicensed and uninsured drivers on our roads. HB1577 would also have a number of other negative consequences, including increasing auto insurance premiums for all Washington residents, allocating limited local law enforcement and judicial resources to non-violent driving-without-a-license violations, threatening national security, hurting the labor force of major industries across our state, and disproportionately impacting low-income U.S. Citizens and women who are more likely to lack citizenship verification documents. Finally, we believe HB1577—with a fiscal note of \$6.4 million for the 2011-2013 biennium and \$23.1 million through 2017—appropriates vital funds to misguided policy that will result in much longer waits at DOL for all Washington residents.

Every year for more than a decade, the Washington State legislature and our citizens have rejected efforts to put inflammatory politics above sound policy by restricting or eliminating access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrant taxpayers. They have done this recognizing that safety is the most important consideration, and changing our sound policies around driver's licenses would harm every level of the economy from the family pocketbook to the state budget while having severe negative implications for major industries in our economy.

While there are numerous efforts to eliminate or restrict undocumented immigrant taxpayers' access to driver's licenses, the reasons for doing so are

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dubious. Anecdotal evidence is ubiquitous but finding research and numbers to support these anecdotes proves more difficult.

In fact, DOL has already taken steps to address the issue of people coming from other states to get licenses by requiring [proof of residency](#) for drivers without social security numbers (SSNs). In a November 4 [press release](#), DOL announced it would begin requiring proof of residency for drivers without social security numbers. The policy took effect on November 8 and the agency has not had sufficient time to analyze results. At the time, DOL director Liz Luce said: “This is another in a series of steps we’ve taken to clamp down on license fraud and ensure that people are Washington residents if they’re getting a license.” According to DOL’s own statistics, a considerable drop took place between October and November in licenses provided to residents without SSNs, hinting toward the effectiveness of this policy, but it needs more time to be evaluated. Consequently, HB1577 is not necessary for cracking down on out-of-state drivers, since policies have been changed recently to address the issue.

In a dire budget time, when critical programs are being slashed and eliminated, changing our drivers’ license laws under HB1577 will cost the state at least \$6.4 million in the 2011-2013 biennium and \$23.1 million through 2017 (OFM fiscal note). The new identification requirements for driver’s licenses will also require new funds for training on immigration documents and result in additional time and resources spent on processing applications. In fact, the fiscal note estimates that the passage of HB1577 will “require an additional three minutes of staff time per customer.” Lines are already long at DOL and we do not need to make them longer by implementing this misguided policy. This fiscal note does not include the loss of revenue due to undocumented immigrants foregoing the second class licenses that brand them as undocumented or costs necessary for outreach to affected communities, which in this case is all Washingtonians. Scarce resources in this year’s budget should go toward policies and programs that provide proven benefits to Washington State, not to misguided attempts to address our broken immigration system.

Creating a “two-tiered” drivers’ license system that brands people as undocumented will undermine public safety for all Washington state drivers. Two-tiered systems in other states (such as Tennessee) have even been suspended, with tremendous challenges to those systems uncovered once the law was passed. The reality is that our roads are safest when we license as many drivers as possible and we ensure that they have insurance. The “two-tiered” driver’s license system will only keep undocumented immigrants from getting

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licenses that clearly identify them as undocumented and will result in a large pool of unlicensed and uninsured drivers. Unfortunately, many immigrant drivers are already subject to discrimination and racial profiling and they will not want to get licenses that will reveal their immigration status to law enforcement and any other individuals who sees their license. Undocumented immigrant taxpayers will not stop driving, since livelihoods and industries rely on workers who drive. Instead, undocumented immigrant taxpayers will drive without licenses, without having passed road safety tests and without access to auto insurance. According to the AAA Foundation, unlicensed drivers are [five times more likely](#) to be in a fatal car accident. When New Mexico changed their law to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, the rate of uninsured drivers in that state dropped from 33 percent in 2002 to 10.6 percent in 2007. Everyone is safer when all drivers are licensed and insured.

Putting up new barriers to accessing drivers' licenses for the undocumented population drives up insurance premiums for all residents. Washington State currently has auto insurance rates well below the national average. The New York State Department of Insurance [estimated](#) that expanding license access for the undocumented population would reduce the premium costs associated with uninsured motorist coverage by 34% and save New York drivers \$120 million. Restricting access would have the reverse effect, costing all Washington residents money during difficult economic times.

State law enforcement and judicial efforts are undermined by drivers' license restrictions. Driver's license restrictions cause immigrants—including domestic violence victims, victims of crime, or those who have information that is useful to law enforcement—to avoid contact with state and local law enforcement and be unwilling to report crimes that assist local law enforcement in community policing activities. The undermining of trust in the immigrant community only makes the entire community less safe. In addition, increasing the number of unlicensed and uninsured drivers on the road will take up valuable law enforcement resources and congest courts with non-violent driving-without-a-license charges, instead of spending scarce resources on violent and dangerous criminals.

Ensuring drivers' licenses for all drivers enhances national security; eliminating or restricting drivers' licenses for the undocumented population decreases security for all. National security is enhanced when we can keep track of everyone who is here. Ironically, in 2005, the [Government Accountability Office](#) reported that US Immigration and Customs Enforcement found the driver's license databases to

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be more current than the DHS database. We are safer as a state and as a nation when we have information about people who are living within our borders, including their pictures, names and addresses. This bill would leave us without any knowledge of the name, whereabouts and identity of thousands of Washington State residents.

The citizenship documentation requirements in HB1577 will disproportionately disenfranchise low-income individuals and female U.S. citizen populations, who are more likely to lack necessary documentation to prove citizenship. According to a report out of the [Brennan Center for Justice at NYU](#) School of Law, seven percent of U.S. citizens lack documentation to prove their citizenship. However, 12 percent of low-income individuals lack citizenship verification documents and 34 percent of voting-age women lack citizenship documentation with their *current* legal name. HB1577 will only disenfranchise low-income and female U.S. citizen populations in its efforts to verify citizenship.

In many ways, HB1577 acknowledges the need of major industries in Washington State for workers who are disproportionately undocumented immigrants. Washington, more than any other state, relies on exports and undocumented workers are essential in every aspect of the export industry, from picking fruits and vegetables in the fields, to working the shipping yards and transporting goods throughout the state. HB1577 would place additional barriers between major industries in Washington and its workforce, threatening the economic vitality of our state.

Finally, restricting access to driver's licenses for the undocumented will not solve the broken immigration system. While it may be tempting to take out the public frustration with the lack of movement on comprehensive immigration reform, restricting or eliminating driver's licenses does not solve the issue of needing to find a solution for our broken immigration system. Instead, it simply decreases safety and increases costs to the state's residents and to state government. It is incumbent on our state legislators to protect public safety and separately work towards realistic solutions, not sound bites and politics as usual.

HB1577 represents a misguided attempt to address issues related to our broken immigration system. Our state is safer when our drivers have licenses and insurance, when we know who resides within our state lines, and when we allow local law enforcement to protect our communities from violent and dangerous criminals, instead of focusing on individuals who are here to work and provide a better life for their family. We urge the committee to place sound policy above

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the politics of immigration by opposing HB1577 and other efforts to undermine the best interests and safety of Washington and all its residents.

Respectfully submitted,



Pramila Jayapal  
Executive Director  
OneAmerica



Toby Guevin  
State Policy & Legislative Manager  
OneAmerica