

February 3, 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 SB5407  
Transportation Committee**

Distinguished Members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

On behalf of OneAmerica and its members, we submit the following testimony in strong opposition to SB5407.

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. SB5407 threatens the social, civic and economic opportunities of many immigrant communities.

By eliminating access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrant taxpayers, we believe SB5407 would undermine public safety by creating a new group of unlicensed and uninsured drivers on our roads. SB5407 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, and hurting the labor force of major industries across our state. Finally, we believe SB5407—with a fiscal note of \$1.8 million for the 2011-2013 biennium and \$10.5 million over 10 years—appropriates vital funds to misguided policy.

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

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Washington State has issued an unparalleled number of licenses to out of state drivers recently. A quick look at Department of Licensing (DOL) statistics on immigration of driver's licenses, shows that while 2010 saw many licenses issued (159,501), there are at least two years (164,127 in 2006 and 161,295 in 1990) with more. The years between 2006 and 2010 see no discernable spikes. The lack of significant increases in licenses issued is especially surprising considering the state has added hundreds of thousands of residents in the past ten years alone.

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. 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." Consequently, SB5407 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 will also cost the state \$1.8 million in the 2011-2013 biennium and \$10.5 million over 10 years (OFM fiscal note). The new identification requirements for driver's licenses will require new funds for training on immigration documents and result in additional time and resources spent on processing certain applications. \$1.5 million in driver's license and related fees will be lost in the 2011-2013 biennium alone. Moreover, the fiscal note does not include necessary outreach to affected communities, which could cost up to \$750,000 according to the traffic safety commission estimates. Scarce resources in this year's budget should go toward policies and programs that provide proven benefits to Washington State.

Eliminating drivers' licenses undermines public safety for all Washington state drivers. The reality is that our roads are safest when we license as many drivers as possible and we ensure that they have insurance. Eliminating access to driver's licenses will not stop undocumented immigrant taxpayers from 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

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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.

Denying drivers’ licenses to 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. Eliminating 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 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.

Finally, denying 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 issues of needing to find a

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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.

SB5407 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 the politics of immigration by opposing SB5407 and other efforts to undermine the best interests and safety of Washington and all its residents.

Respectfully submitted,



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