

# Strangers No Longer

*Michigan Drivers License Campaign*



*September, 2020*

# ***Michigan Drivers License Initiative***

## ***What is it?***

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- ***Introduced:*** October of 2019 to the Michigan legislature.
  - Senate bills 631 and 632
  - House bills 5192 and 5193.
- **These bills are called the Drive SAFE plan**, short for Safety, Access, Freedom, and the Economy.

**These bills allow any person who meets age requirements and can prove Michigan residency obtain a state identification card or apply for a driver's license, including immigrants living in Michigan without legal permission.**

*The right to get a drivers license without proof of citizenship was allowed in Michigan until it was rescinded in 2008 by the Attorney General of Michigan. The Michigan legislature then passed legislation that codified this into law.*

# ***Michigan Drivers License Initiative***

## ***Why is it Important?***

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- **An Issue of Human Dignity**

- Allowing drivers licenses helps ensure all our neighbors are able to take care of their family, get to work, and be part of their community. Immigrants often wait years for their day in court
- Groups who stand to benefit include DACA recipients, undocumented immigrants, and legal immigrants who haven't received their verification documents because of bureaucratic delays.

- **Improve Public Safety**

- Ensuring that Michigan drivers have taken drivers' tests and have car insurance would be a benefit to all of us.
- According to AAA, unlicensed drivers are five times more likely to get into fatal car crashes.
- Increased traffic safety knowledge will decrease accidents, hit and runs, and those who flee due to lack of license / insurance.
- After New Mexico passed this policy traffic fatalities fell 23%.

- **Agriculture Benefits to the State of MI (supported by the MI Farm Bureau)**

- The approximately 150,000 undocumented residents in Michigan play a large role in the farming, auto, service and manufacturing industries. By allowing this workforce to lawfully drive to and from work, they will be better workers by arriving to work consistently and on time.
- With 15 other states offering drivers licenses to those unable to prove legal presence, Michigan is increasingly losing the competition for workers.
- Apple growers and others have reported increased shortages in available labor due to Michigan's 2008 policy change.

# ***Michigan Drivers License Initiative***

## ***Why is it Important (continued)?***

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- **Improve Community Safety**

- License and ID holders in immigrant communities are more likely to report/cooperate with investigations of crime.
- Reduces production/sale of fraudulent documentation.
- A stronger drivers license database can benefit law enforcement
- Forcing those who can't open a bank account because of lack of photo ID to carry cash makes them more likely to be targets of crime.

- **Potential Economic Benefits to the State of Michigan**

- Without valid licenses, people are prevented from participating in economic activities that are both essential to a stable home as well as beneficial to the Michigan economy.
- Michigan League for Public Policy predicts \$13.5 million in revenue over the first 3 years in new licenses and vehicle purchases.
- Auto insurance premiums could decrease. An auto insurance pool widened by relicensed and newly licensed drivers because of this legislation could help to hold down premium costs for all Michiganders.

# ***Michigan Drivers License Initiative***

## ***Who Supports It? – The Michigan Catholic Conference*** ***(along with 32 other organizations across the state)***

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**Comments of Tom Hickson, Michigan Catholic Conference Vice President for Public Policy, September 20, 2019, Steps of Michigan State Capitol:**

“Transportation is vital to nearly every aspect of life, and to have good transportation access, you need a driver’s license. The inability to obtain a license makes life’s most basic functions extremely difficult. Most of us take for granted life’s routine tasks, such as driving to work, going to a doctor’s appointment, taking a child to school, going to church, or picking up groceries.

For many of residents of this state, these types of tasks can be a great risk. I’ll give you a few examples:

- The factory worker trying to get to work to earn a living and pay taxes.
- The young couple who is trying to get to their child to a school.
- Picking up a child from day care or taking one to a doctor.

All of these situations require a driver’s license. ***Prohibiting individuals from gaining access to a driver’s license robs them not only of their human dignity but it also hurts the community.***

A driver’s license allows a person to work, to take care of their children, to buy necessary goods and to contribute to our tax revenue. Those that do not have a driver’s license must find other means of transportation, which often is not reliable. For those undocumented individuals that choose to drive, they do so at a great risk to themselves and others. As these individuals will not have access to driver’s training, they could pose a greater traffic safety threat than drivers who do have access to training.

***For these reasons, the Michigan Catholic Conference is proud to stand here today to discuss this issue and looks forward to a robust discussion on this important human dignity issue in the Michigan Legislature.”***

# ***Michigan Drivers License Initiative***

## ***What is the Status of These Bills?***

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In today's political climate, this issue is divided along party lines. Democrats support these bills, Republicans are against them.

Because the Republicans have the majority in both legislative bodies, the bills are currently stuck in committee. The Republican chairs of these committees control what bills come up for debate. **Essentially the Drive SAFE bills are stuck in committee unless we can apply substantial political pressure.**

- The Senate bills are with the Senate Committee on Government Operations chaired by Sen Mike Shirkey (R) – Branch, Hillsdale, and Jackson counties
- The House bills are with the House Committee on Transportation, chaired by Rep. Jack O'Malley (R) – Leelanau, Benzie, Manistee and Mason counties.
- Neither committee has them scheduled for hearings at this time...

# FAQs for Catholics

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## **1. Why should Catholics in Michigan support and embrace undocumented immigrants?**

As Catholic Christians, the preferential option for the poor is deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching and our identity. This teaching is articulated in many sources, among them:

- Matthew 25: 31-46
- Gaudium et spes (Pope Paul VI, 1965)
- Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000)
- Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Vatican, 2004)
- Evangelii gaudium (Pope Francis, 2013)
- Safe Migration: 20 Action Points (Vatican, 2017)

## **2. Why couldn't the undocumented Latino immigrants emigrate to the U.S. using the right and legal channels as our grandparents did?**

- Many of our immigrant forebears were also undocumented and had no legal status when they entered the U.S.
- "Immigrant" is a misnomer for Latinos fleeing from immediate, endemic violence and crushing poverty in their home countries. "Refugee" is a more appropriate term to describe them.
- The normal immigration process for Latinos may take 20-30 years, during which time they and their families might not survive the violence and poverty in their home countries 20-30 times over.

## **3. Are the Latino immigrants nowadays economic refugees only?**

- This is only partially true. For Latino immigrants as for our forebears, to seek a more secure financial future for our families is a bond that we all share.
- The other major cause of migration is the immediate, endemic violence from which Latino refugees receive no protection from the governments of their own countries.

## **4. Will Latino immigrants overrun Michigan?**

- Today, only about 6.6% of Michiganders are immigrants, the same percentage that we saw in 2000. The Latino population does not account for the biggest percentage, only about 110,000-120,000 or 19% of the total immigrant population.
- Many Latino immigrants have lived in Michigan for years, with native-born children and working to raise their families.

## **5. Will Latino immigrants take unfair advantage of our social welfare system?**

- If they are undocumented, Latino immigrants are not eligible for federal benefits like food stamps, Medicaid or Social Security. The proposed "public charge" rule by the Department of Homeland Security further discourages immigrants from making use of these benefits even if available.
- According to a 2018 study, eligible immigrants use 27% fewer benefits than U.S. natives of similar incomes and ages.
- While the undocumented are not eligible for social security benefits, the social security deductions from their paychecks help bolster the system.

# FAQs for Catholics (2)

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## **6. Will Latino immigrants take away jobs from native-born Michiganders?**

Latino immigrants often labor in jobs from which native-born Michiganders shy away, for example, in the agriculture, construction, landscaping and hospitality industries. Their low wages in fact subsidize the costs of our food and other products and services in such industries and others.

## **7. Are Latino immigrants a drain on Michigan's economy?**

- Immigrants in Michigan are hardworking, often taking several part-time jobs to make ends meet. They are less likely to be unemployed than U.S.-born residents.
- In 2015, for example, the undocumented in Michigan paid \$86.6 million in state and local taxes, and young DACA-eligible immigrants paid \$13.4 million.
- As workers, consumers and business owners, immigrants in 2015, contributed 9% of the total state GDP in Michigan.

## **8. Do immigrants bring crime to Michigan?**

- Study after study has shown that immigrants are less likely than native-born citizens to commit crimes. Other studies have shown that the crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth, and that states with larger shares of undocumented immigrants tend to have lower crime rates than states with smaller shares.
- There is no credible evidence that terrorists enter the U.S. through the border with Mexico. The vast majority of U.S. residents linked to terrorism since 2002 are U.S. citizens.

## **9. Do immigrants from Latin America bring diseases into the U.S.?**

According to the World Health Organization, many countries in Latin America have higher vaccination rates for 1-year-olds than the U.S.

## **10. Why should Michigan extend driving privileges to the undocumented immigrants?**

- Giving the opportunity to obtain driver's licenses to the undocumented immigrants makes good public policy sense for Michigan.
- The required driver's license training and testing make the undocumented better drivers and improve road safety for everyone. For example, a 2016 study found fewer traffic fatalities on average in states that do not restrict driving based on immigration status.

## **11. What are the revenue implications of extending driver's licenses to the undocumented for Michigan?**

- An estimated 55,000 new driver's licenses will be issued, and 20,000 vehicles will be purchased, resulting in \$13.5 million in revenue in the first 3 years.
- In addition, \$12 million in annual revenue will be generated from sales and gas taxes, resulting in \$100 million in revenue over 10 years.

# FAQs for Catholics (3)

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## 12. What will happen to our auto insurance premiums if we allow the undocumented to obtain driver's licenses?

- Current drivers will see a modest decrease by \$20 in their annual auto insurance premiums due to an increased pool of drivers.
- A study has shown that the average auto insurance costs are lower in states that allow the undocumented to obtain driver's licenses than in states that do not.

## 13. What does allowing driver's licenses for the undocumented mean for Michigan's economy?

- Michigan's \$100 billion agricultural industry needs workers with reliable transportation. An estimated 5% of the state's undocumented work in this industry. The Michigan Farm Bureau endorses driver's licenses for the undocumented.
- With reliable transportation, the undocumented will be able to secure better jobs, work more hours, travel farther to meet employers' labor needs and purchase goods and services. All that will mean more tax revenue for Michigan.

## 14. Will driver's licenses allow the undocumented to vote?

No, as opposed to Real ID-compliant licenses which require proof of lawful status, future standard driver's licenses extended to the undocumented cannot serve any federal purposes or allow the undocumented to vote.

## 15. If the undocumented have never been allowed to drive in Michigan, why should we set a precedent?

- In fact, the undocumented were allowed to obtain driver's licenses in Michigan prior to 2008. The removal of that privilege resulted from a change in the Attorney General's opinion at the time.
- Along with the District of Columbia, 15 other states already allow the undocumented to obtain driver's licenses: CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, IL, MD, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OR, UT, VT, WA.

## 16. What other non-citizen groups are already allowed to drive in Michigan?

Permanent residents (green card holders), international students, international nationals with work permits, tourists with a valid foreign driver's license from a treaty country along with an international driving permit or a translation of the license with a color photo.

## 17. Why do the undocumented immigrants need driver's licenses in Michigan?

In the absence of accessible, reliable public transportation 7 days a week year-round, the undocumented immigrants need to drive to work, school, church, medical appointments, grocery-shopping, and purchase goods and services out of their immediate areas.

### Sources:

Alianza Americas, Centro Presente, and Lawyers for Civil Rights (Boston). "Fleeing, Not Migrating" (2019).

Anti-Defamation League. "Myths and Facts About Immigrants and Immigration" (2019).

Michigan Immigrant Rights Center. "Immigrants and Michigan Driver's Licenses: Past, Present, and Future." (2018)

Simon Marshall-Shah. "Taking Our Foot Off the Brakes: Why Driver's Licenses For All Makes Sense". Michigan League for Public Policy (2019)

Victoria Crouse. "A Snapshot of Immigrants in Michigan." Michigan League for Public Policy (2019).

Victoria Crouse. "Immigrant Families in Michigan: A State Profile." Michigan League for Public Policy (2017).

## Reflection Question:

*How is God calling me to help change social structures to protect and preserve human life and dignity?*

### Some ways you can be an advocate:

- Pray for immigrants and refugees.
- Join a Circle of Support or start one at your parish.
- Meet with your Michigan legislator to ask for the MI Drive SAFE bills to come out of committee for a discussion.
- Write a letter to your Michigan legislator or call their office and ask for the MI Drive SAFE bills to come out of committee for a discussion.
- Listen to stories of immigrants and refugees, for example:  
<https://storycorps.org/page/2/?s=immigration&type=listen>
- Study more about this issue at:  
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/index.cfm>