

Testimony from Tobin Williamson of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition regarding:
LD 1138: An Act to Improve Work and Family Mobility by Altering and Removing Certain Requirements for Driver's Licenses and Nondriver Identification Cards

Sponsored By: Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland

Public Hearing: January 16, 2024 at 1:00pm

Dear Members of the Committee on Transportation:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I am the Manager of Advocacy & Policy with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a network of around 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities across the state. MIRC works to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard at the State House in Augusta, in the Halls of Congress in DC, and in municipalities around Maine.

For several years now, removing the legal presence requirement to obtain a driver's license or nondriver identification card has been a policy proposal we have been monitoring closely. Throughout the country, this idea is gaining traction; indeed, around twenty states have now implemented [some form of this policy](#), including much of New England. As this momentum grows, we are hopeful that Maine will soon join them.

Maine has very limited access to public transportation, even in its larger cities like Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor; having a car is an important if not required part of reliably getting to one's workplace here (to say nothing of getting to medical appointments, buy groceries, take children to daycare, and other essential life activities). We know this is especially true in some of the more rural areas in the state, including places along the Canadian border where this policy could be particularly impactful given the proximity to another nation and .

Policies like this also make our [roads safer for all](#). Statistics show that in states with similar policies, hit-and-run accidents and high-speed chases decrease, as people without status are less likely to flee the scene of an accident or from a routine traffic stop if their legal status is not obvious on their documentation. To quote former Lewiston Mayor and Police Chief's Laurent F. Gilbert, Sr.'s testimony from last year, this policy would be "an overdue and common-sense update to Maine's driving laws that will improve public safety by ensuring that all drivers, regardless of immigration status, can be licensed, insured, and know the rules of the road."

Finally, to clarify some myths / rumors / misinformation that have been spread around on social media, this push does not include anything about voting eligibility for people who are not U.S. Citizens; it is simply a bill that would make our roads safer and improve Maine's economy. We at MIRC respect the U.S. elections process (indeed, civic engagement and encouraging eligible U.S. Citizens to vote is one of our organizational priorities), and we would not support anything that breaks those rules.

As I mentioned earlier, there are now approaching two dozen states that have created a policy such as the one in the legislation proposed in Speaker Talbot Ross to remove immigration status as a prerequisite to get a driver's license. Our state's incredible BMV employees are not trained to be federal immigration officers, so we hope Maine will join that list soon, whether this year or in the near future. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue, and we look forward to continued conversation around it moving forward in the future.

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