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Removing Barriers to Licenses for Immigrant Drivers Boosts Road Safety, Communities

Updated report confirms that early adopter states have seen greater declines in accidents than nationwide

Richmond, VA -- Providing all Virginians, regardless of immigration status, the opportunity to get a driver's license could increase road safety by boosting the share of drivers who are trained and tested, according to a newly updated report by The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. With new majorities in the Virginia House and Senate, this report provides a timely update on the community, economic, and public safety benefits of removing barriers to licenses for undocumented immigrants -- an issue that has seen growing support in Virginia and around the country.

According to the report, by the end of December, 13 states and the District of Columbia will allow unauthorized immigrants to obtain some form of driver's card, with another scheduled to expand access in January 2021. In the three earliest states to implement expanded access to driver's licenses, all have seen a greater than 12% drop in traffic fatalities since 1994, compared to a nationwide 9% drop. Increasing access to driver's licenses could also increase the share of cars that are insured.

"Virginia residents who are already driving should be provided the opportunity to learn and abide by the rules of Virginia's roads," says Laura Goren, Research Director and lead author of the report. "We're all safer when all drivers are trained, tested, licensed, and insured."

Increasing access to driver's licenses would also boost Virginia's communities and economy by enabling workers to fill job openings that would otherwise remain vacant and lower everyone's car insurance costs by boosting road safety and decreasing the number of uninsured drivers.

“Driving is a necessity for most Virginia families, not a choice,” says Goren. “Expanding access to licenses not only helps the individual, it also helps their children and other community members.”

The full report is available online at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

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