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Driver’s Licenses for All Residents Creates a Safe and Secure Pennsylvania
New Report from Temple Law School Highlights the Benefits of Extending Driver’s Licenses to Undocumented Immigrants

Philadelphia, PA (June 25, 2015) – A Pennsylvania law that denies driver’s licenses to residents based on their immigration status is bad for the state, according to a new report from the Sheller Center for Social Justice at Temple Law School, based on over 200 surveys collected by Fight for Drivers Licenses.

The law prevents undocumented residents from driving under any circumstances, even an emergency. In one case, a four-year-old girl who broke her arm was delayed in getting to the hospital because her father could not drive her there. Access to routine medical care was also a problem; 85% of those surveyed said that they or a family member had missed a medical appointment in the past year because they could not drive to it.

“We take our freedom of movement for granted, but for some residents without licenses, access to basic human needs such as medical care, housing, and education become difficult,” said Matthew Strout, one of the law students who worked on the report.

The law also creates a safety hazard, the report states. Because it does not administer the driving test to undocumented immigrants – some of whom will drive anyway in order to get to essential employment or other services – the state has no way of ensuring that they have the skills needed to drive safely.

The report also points out that the law costs the state money, in the form of lost license fees, unnecessary police costs, and more.

“Pennsylvania’s law seems to be an effort to punish undocumented immigrants,” said Michaela Dragalin, another law student who worked on the report. “But under our Constitution, immigration is the responsibility of the federal government, not the states. And in any case, a law that harms residents, deprives the state of revenue and makes our highways less safe does not seem to be furthering any positive purpose.”
In contrast to Pennsylvania, the report states, ten states require all residents to obtain driver’s licenses, regardless of immigration status.

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Students in the Social Justice Lawyering Clinic at the Sheller Center for Social Justice, under the guidance of Professor Jennifer Lee, engage in advocacy on behalf of legally underserved groups in Pennsylvania.