

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Letter To The Editor: Permit Undocumented VI Residents To Have Driver's License

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Staff **May 11, 2015**



Dear Editor,

I have been meaning to write about this for some time, but the recent discussion about Hillary Clinton's visit to Nevada raised it for me again. The issue is drivers licenses for our undocumented residents. Nevada is one of the 10 states that has them. DC and Puerto Rico have also passed laws creating them.

I have long supported having a provisional license or some legal document allowing individuals living in the U.S. Virgin Islands, who are not legal residents to drive, and have discussed it with local and federal law enforcement who, I will have to admit, have

universally been opposed to the idea. I have been told that DMV has been faced with many individuals seeking licenses who don't have documentation of legally being here.

Most of the opposition voiced by the law enforcement community, as I understand it, has been that it would suggest acceptance of illegal immigration and may interfere with their legal authorities. In response, let me say that the card does not preclude any federal actions, but neither should the VI government - DMV - be required to report their presence. Furthermore, the United States is closed to some form of immigration reform. Whether it provides a path to citizenship or not, it will likely end deportations unless there is criminal activity. Already, deportations are less likely under the expanded judicial discretion and they would essentially end for anyone without a criminal history should the President's executive order survive court scrutiny.

But I am also told that many undocumented persons drive already without a license and unless there is an accident or violation of some sort, there is no way to know who does or does not have a license. That means they have no insurance.

A special license based on verifiable authentic identification would give these individuals a valid government photo ID for use wherever applicable, but it would be clear that the document would not make them eligible for programs that are only applicable to citizens.

In most jurisdictions there may be a slightly higher cost for these licenses, but even if not, they generally require more frequent renewal. Even at the same cost this would mean additional revenue to the government and possibly also to the economy. I believe a license is required when one purchases a car, if only to have the car properly registered.

The every 2 or 3 year renewal may help to to maintain accurate addresses which I am sure our hospitals and other government agencies would appreciate. The data should also help us and the federal government to plan for needed services, even possible additional federal funding and especially to be able to estimate the impact when immigration reform becomes law.

Again, these licenses would not be the same as those for citizens and legal residents. They would be clearly identifiable and indicate that they are "special", "provisional" or whatever designation the VI government would decide on.

I know that some of the leaders of our immigrant communities have approached several senators about passing legislation to create these licenses. I am sure that there will be people in the community who will vehemently oppose them, but hope it would find some support.

I believe that this is an issue that is ripe for our consideration.

Submitted by:

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