



Making Pennsylvania’s Undocumented Immigrants Mobile: Enacting Driver’s License Expansion Policy That Works for Everyone

By: Maisum Murtaza

September 22, 2020

Driving is such an essential part of basic mobility that most of us take it for granted. Many of us see no risk in simply getting in our cars and driving to a doctor’s appointment or to pick up groceries for our families. The right to free mobility, however, is not afforded to our undocumented immigrant population. In Pennsylvania, proof of legal residency is required for a driver’s license.

Figure 1.

15 States and the District of Columbia Allow Residents To Have Access to Driver’s Licenses Regardless of Immigration Status	
State	Effective Date
California	Jan. 2015
Colorado	Aug. 2014
Connecticut	Jan. 2015
Delaware	Dec. 2015
Hawaii	Jan. 2016
Illinois	Nov. 2013
Maryland	Jan. 2014
New Jersey	June. 2020
New Mexico	May. 2016
New York	Dec. 2019
Nevada	Jan. 2014
Oregon	Aug. 2019
Utah	Mar. 2005
Vermont	Jan. 2014
Washington	July. 1993
D.C.	May. 2014

Conference of State Legislatures.
 Accessed at:
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/states-offering-driver-s-licenses-to-immigrants.aspx>

This policy is problematic in multiple ways. First, it makes it difficult for immigrant families to freely navigate their day-to-day activities and chores, secure employment, and provide for their families. Second, it hurts our state’s economy by making it difficult for undocumented immigrants to fill jobs for which they have the appropriate skills that might otherwise go unfilled. The undocumented immigrant population makes an important contribution to our economy and could make an even greater one if these residents were allowed access to driver’s licenses. Third, allowing undocumented immigrants to secure driver’s licenses would lead to safer streets and more insured drivers, which would reduce auto insurance costs. Finally, expanding access to driver’s licenses would not only be free for the state, but it would lead to increased state revenue from both sales taxes on auto-related purchases and driver’s license processing fees.

In the last few years, more states have realized the benefit of giving residents access to driver’s licenses regardless of their immigration status. In 2019, the state of New York, which had restricted access to driver’s licenses based on immigration status since 2003, delinked access to licenses from the immigration status of its residents. New Jersey and Oregon also recently enacted legislation allowing people to

have access to driver’s licenses irrespective of immigration status. Today, 15 states and the District of Columbia have similar policies in place.¹

¹ For analysis on economic benefits of driver’s license expansion in New Jersey and expansion of policy in other states, see Erika J. Nava, “Let’s Drive New Jersey: Expanding Access to Driver’s Licenses is a Common-Sense Step in the Right Direction”, January 2018: <http://www.njpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NJPPLetsDriveJan2018.pdf> .

This paper begins with an estimate of the number of Pennsylvanians who would seek a driver’s license if they were offered to undocumented immigrants. Then we turn to an estimate of the new revenue generated by the policy. Finally, we look at some other benefits of the policy.

How Many Undocumented Immigrants Would Seek Driver’s Licenses?

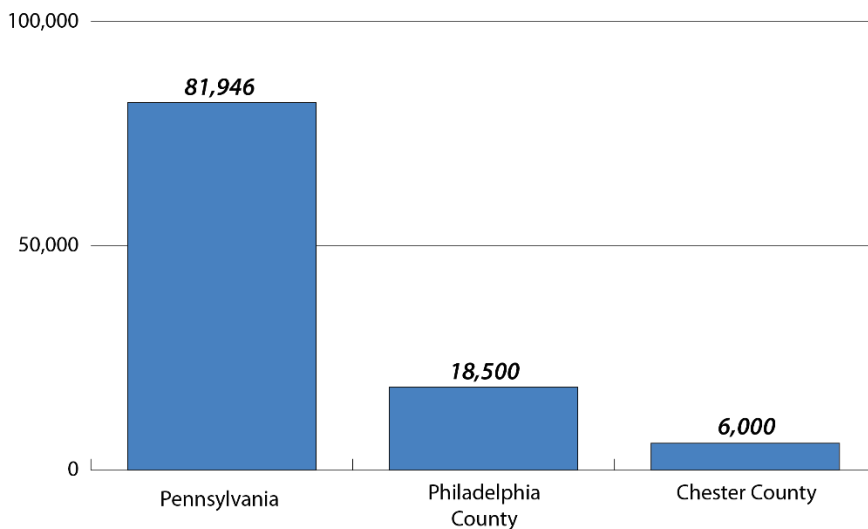
To estimate the benefits to individuals and the state, we must first know how many undocumented immigrants in Pennsylvania would secure a driver’s license if allowed to do so.

Pennsylvania’s population of eligible undocumented immigrants, 16 years of age or older, is estimated to be 163,892.²

Illinois found that within 3 years of changing its laws, about 50% of eligible, undocumented immigrants secured driver’s licenses when given the chance.³ If the take-up rate in Pennsylvania were similar, after 3 years we would expect 81,946 undocumented immigrants in Pennsylvania to secure a driver’s license (Figure 2), increasing the total number of licensed drivers by about 1%.⁴

Figure 2.

Estimated Number of Additional Licenses Within Three Years In State and Top Counties



Source: Keystone Research Center Analysis based on Pennsylvania Undocumented Immigrants State Profile from Center of Migration Studies. Top County Profiles from Migration Policy Institute

² The estimated total of undocumented immigrant population is based on the Center for Migration Studies data profiles for states. The estimate used is from 2017. For more information, please see: <http://data.cmsny.org/>.

³ This report is based on analysis conducted by New York’s Fiscal Policy Institute on New York’s driver’s license expansion. For more information on New York data, see Cyierra Roldan and David Kallick, “Expanding Access to Driver’s Licenses: Getting a License Without Regard to Immigration Status”, January 31, 2017. The FPI report uses data from the Center for Migration studies and results from states that have enacted the policy. For full analysis, please see: <http://fiscalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FINAL-Drivers-licenses-report-2017.pdf>.

⁴ The number of additional licenses is based on a take-up rate of 50% from the FPI report. Total number of licensed drivers in Pennsylvania is taken from PA Department of Motor Vehicles website. For total licensed drivers data, please see <https://www.dmv.pa.gov/pages/pennsylvania-driver-statistics.aspx>.

Parallel to the state increase in total licenses, we would see similar trends in counties. For example, Philadelphia County and Chester County have the highest eligible undocumented populations of 37,000 and 12,000 respectively. Allowing undocumented residents to have access to driver’s licenses would result in an additional 24,500 licenses in just those two counties.⁵ In addition to undocumented immigrant estimations available for Chester and Philadelphia Counties, there are two more counties (Montgomery and Allegheny) with a total undocumented population of more than 9,000.⁶ Expanding access to driver’s licenses will result in a significant increase in immigrants applying for licenses in these counties.

More Licenses, More Cars Purchased

With more licensed drivers in the state, more cars will be purchased. In Figure 3, we estimate the number of cars that would be purchased by newly licensed undocumented immigrants.

Figure 3.

Statewide Additional Licenses and Additional Vehicles Purchased	
Eligible Undocumented Population	163,892
Additional Licenses Within Three Years of Expansion	81,946
Additional Vehicles Purchased Over Three Years	20,486*
Total Registered Passenger Vehicles in the State Prior to Expansion	8,219,631
Percent Increase in Three Years After Enacting Policy for Total Registered Vehicles	0.25%

Sources: Keystone Research Center Analysis based on Center for Migration Studies State Profile.
 Total Registered Vehicles taken from Department of Motor Vehicles Report PA Report of Registration:
<http://www.dot.state.pa.us/public/dvsubforms/BMV/Registration%20Reports/ReportofRegistration2018.pdf>.
 *Take-up rate of .25 is taken from FPI analysis of Center for Migration Studies Microdata. For more information: <http://fiscalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FPI-Additional-cars-report-2017.pdf>.

We do so by looking at the relationship between the number of licensed drivers and the number of vehicle purchases and then adjusting for the difference between the gap in the ownership rate of cars for households with a documented immigrant adult and households with an undocumented immigrant adult, which according to the FPI and Center for Migration Studies microdata is 0.25 (Figure 3).⁶ Using this method, we estimate that by the end of the first three years of allowing undocumented immigrants to hold a driver’s license, 20,487 vehicles would be purchased by the immigrant population, which is a 0.25% increase in the total number of registered vehicles in Pennsylvania.⁷ We estimate below the impact this would have on our state’s revenue.

⁵ Top counties’ undocumented immigrant profiles are available through the Migration Policy Institute website. Estimations are based on MPI 2016 data. The same 50% license take-up rate is applied. For top counties data, please see: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/us-immigration-policy-program-data-hub/unauthorized-immigrant-population-profiles>.

⁶ The estimation of the additional cars purchased is based on the methodology from another New York Fiscal Policy Institute report. For more detailed explanations of New York data and methodology see, David Kallick, Cyierra Roldan, and Xiao Cheng, “Expanding Access to Driver’s Licenses: *How Many Additional Cars Might Be Purchased?*”, January 31, 2017. FPI used microdata from Center for Migration studies that is no longer available, so their analysis and take-up rates are applied to the Pennsylvania undocumented population for the purposes of this report. For FPI methodology details, please see: <http://fiscalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FPI-Additional-cars-report-2017.pdf>.

⁷ Total number of registered vehicles used in the estimation are taken from Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Report of Registration 2018. For data, please see: <http://www.dot.state.pa.us/public/dvsubforms/BMV/Registration%20Reports/ReportofRegistration2018.pdf>.

Additional Revenue and Costs

An estimation of additional licenses and vehicles purchased allows us to estimate new revenue as a result of expanding driver's licenses. The cost to the applicant, per driver's license, is \$35.50 per person which is a price set to offset the costs of processing the license. While Pennsylvania's undocumented immigrant population is not as big as New York's, California's, or Illinois's, the new policy could lead to hiring more employees to process the additional licenses. According to FPI, "In Illinois, 100 new people were hired to service about the same number of license applicants as anticipated in New York...while the fees from licenses should cover these costs, it would be appropriate to allocate the funding to the agency prior to the fee revenues coming in so that it can staff up to accommodate anticipated demand." Given that Pennsylvania's eligible population is much smaller than New York's, we are looking at a smaller increase in additional employees.

Despite the smaller immigrant population, Pennsylvania could expect a \$13 million increase in revenue from taxes, registration fees, license fees, and vehicle-related purchases in the first three years after implementation. This includes annual increases like the increases in sales tax and one-time license fees that would be renewed once the license expires. Every 4 years an additional \$30.50 in renewal fees would be charged to the applicant which is not included in the total estimation since we are looking at licenses issued within the first 3 years of the expansion.

We can estimate additional revenues from vehicle-related consumption and sales, liquid fuel tax, and vehicle registration based on the total annual revenue from each category (taken from the Statistical Supplement for the Pennsylvania Tax Compendium 2017-2018) and multiplied by the .25% in total vehicles (see Figure 3).

- **\$3.5 million from taxes on vehicle-related consumption and sales.** Based on the Statistical Supplement for the Pennsylvania Tax Compendium on the Department of Revenue website.
- **\$4.6 million from additional liquid fuels taxes.**
- **\$1.9 million from vehicle registration fees.** Based on the vehicle registration and titling portion of licenses and fees.
- **\$2.9 million from license fees.** Based on number of estimated new licenses and fee per new license (\$35.50).

Figure 4.

Additional State Revenue Within First Three Years of Expanding Driver's Licenses in Pennsylvania	
Rate of ownership	0.25
Estimate of Additional Cars Purchased	20,487
Percentage growth from existing vehicles	0.25%
Additional tax rev from consumption and sales	\$3,471,145
Additional tax rev from liquid fuels tax	\$4,601,951
Additional Rev from registration (based on fund revenue)	\$1,933,010
Additional Rev from driver's license fees	\$2,909,083
Total added Rev using Tax compendium	\$12,915,189

Sources: Keystone Research Center analysis based on Statistical Supplement for the Pennsylvania Tax Compendium 2017-2018. Additional Cars Purchased based on take-up rate and ownership rates used in New York Fiscal Policy Institute report, "Expanding Access to Driver's Licenses: How many Additional Cars Might be Purchased?"

While the \$13 million increase in revenue from the expansion of this policy would be a modest revenue increase over a three-year period, much of it include gains with little or no cost attached.

Expanding Driver’s Licenses has Benefits for All

Expanding access to driver’s licenses will bring in additional revenue to the state, which is surely a benefit. But there are many other social, economic and community benefits to such a policy change. Expanding driver’s licenses will positively impact people’s work, health and well-being, while also strengthening communities.

Improving the economy

As we will show in a forthcoming report, undocumented immigrants make a major contribution to the economy of the state. Allowing more immigrant families to drive legally would give them access to a wider range of jobs. Employers and employees would be able to take advantage of better job-matching given the increase in mobility of undocumented immigrants. Currently, more than half of undocumented immigrants in Pennsylvania live below 200% of the poverty level, which, for a family of four would be a little over \$50,000/year.

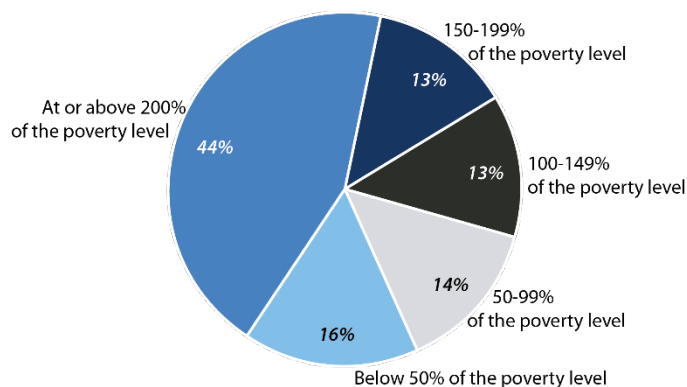
While we can’t precisely estimate the jobs impact of allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver’s license, we know that matching workers to jobs that best suit them is critical to an efficient economy and would result in higher incomes for many immigrant families. Survey results from 2015, published by Temple University’s Beasley School of Law and conducted by MILPA (Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania) and their Driving PA Forward Campaign indicated the adverse effects of limiting access to driver’s licenses on job matching (as well as housing and educational opportunities).⁸ Survey results showed that due to their ineligibility for licenses **89%** of survey participants took work for less pay or fewer hours.

Insurance savings

Insurance savings is another benefit of expanding licenses. Licensed drivers can buy coverage which leads to reducing the cost of covering accidents involving uninsured drivers. This also reduces insurance

Figure 5.

More Than Half of Undocumented Immigrants in Pennsylvania Have Family Incomes Below 200% of the Poverty Level



Source: KRC analysis of Migration Policy Institute State Undocumented Immigrant profiles.

⁸ For full analysis of the immigrant survey results, see Fight for Driver’s Licenses (now Driving PA Forward) and Temple University report, authored by Michaela Dragalin, Teena Handline, Matthew Strout, and Emery Abdel-Latif, “Driver’s Licenses for All: The Key to Safety and Security in Pennsylvania,” June 2015. Accessed at: <https://drivingpaforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FDL-Report.pdf>

rates for everyone.⁹ Increasing the number of insured drivers also plays a part in reducing crashes involving unlicensed drivers and decreasing out-of-pocket costs from the crashes.¹⁰

Other benefits for undocumented residents

Being able to drive legally will help undocumented immigrants gain better access to:

- grocery stores;
- school and school activities for their children;
- doctor's offices and access to health care;¹¹
- adequate housing;
- utility services; and
- better employment opportunities (including retaining jobs).

The ability to have better access to grocery stores and healthy food options, schools, health care, utilities and better jobs will improve people's lives and communities across the state. Without the ability to drive, all of these critical life-sustaining aspects of life are more difficult to access. The FDL/Temple University published survey results indicated that 92% of participants had difficulty getting utility services as a result of not having proper identification; 87% had problems renting adequate housing; and 85% of undocumented immigrants surveyed had to give up educational opportunities, which include going to better schools or a scholarship opportunity. Half of those surveyed said that prior to 2003 when existing restrictions were put in place, they had a license and the cancellation of that license resulted in them losing their jobs. Mobility in communities being restricted to this level results in worse job matching thus affecting everyone in the community.

Benefits for immigrant and mixed status families

Many undocumented immigrants have been in Pennsylvania for years. These residents have contributed to all forms of taxes and created lives here alongside other immigrants and U.S. citizens alike. In fact, according to the Migration Policy Institute almost 50% of undocumented immigrants in Pennsylvania have been in the country for at least 10 years, with 25% having been in the U.S. for 15 years (see Figure 6).

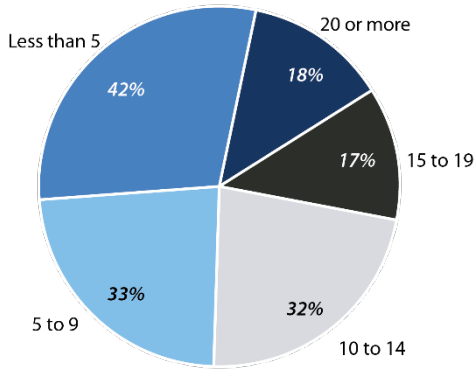
⁹ One study found that on average, states that allowed undocumented immigrants access to a driver's license, saw a savings of a \$17 per year in car insurance – a modest but statistically significant savings. From: Mauricio Cáceres and Kenneth P. Jameson, "The Effects on Insurance Costs of Restricting Undocumented Immigrants' Access to Driver Licenses," *Southern Economic Journal*, 2015, vol. 81, number 4.

¹⁰ Research brief written by Diana Guelespe and Ruth Gomberg-Munoz titled "Licensing Immigrant Motorists in Illinois and Improving Road Safety For All." For full report, please see: <https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Licensing-Imm-Motorists-in-IL.pdf>.

¹¹ The Driving PA Forward MILPA survey shows that 59% of participants believed a driver's license is crucial to their well-being and that of their family. Fight for Driver's Licenses was a campaign organized by MILPA along with other immigrant led groups. The coalition has since changed the name to Driving PA Forward. For more information on the campaign and the conversations conducted by them on this subject, please see: <https://drivingpaforward.org/>

Figure 6.

Years of Residence in the United States for Pennsylvania Undocumented Immigrants

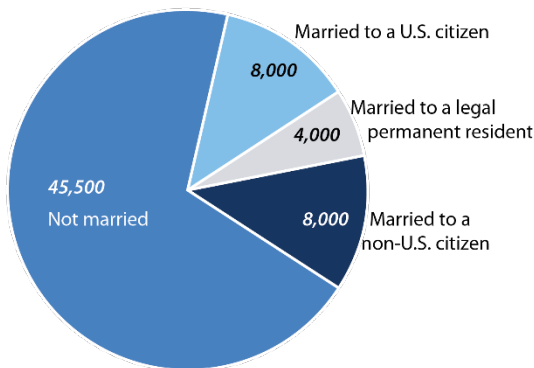


Source: KRC analysis of Migration Policy Institute State Undocumented Immigrant profiles.

Expanding the policy for driver’s licenses is also beneficial to families within a community that have children and spouses both of U.S. citizenship and immigrant status. From something as simple as taking a risk-free trip to the doctor’s office for a child or having a car to complete the daily chores of a household, the increased mobility granted by driver’s licenses can positively impact thousands of families in Pennsylvania (as shown in Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7.

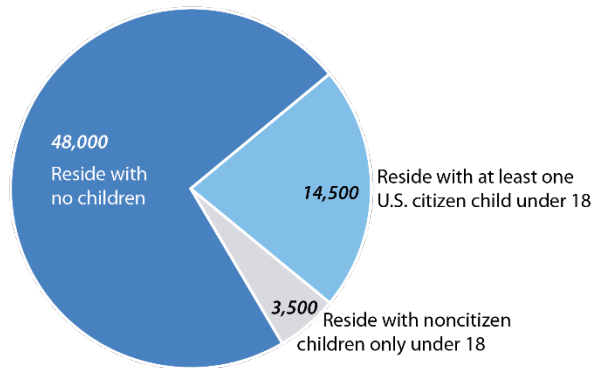
Of Potential New Driver’s License Holders, More Than 30% Are Married



Source: KRC analysis of Migration Policy Institute State Undocumented Immigrant profiles.

Figure 8.

More Than 27% of Immigrants That Are Eligible for Licenses Have Children



Source: KRC analysis of Migration Policy Institute State Undocumented Immigrant profiles.

Figures 7 and 8 assume the same FPI driver’s license take-up rate of 50%. Pennsylvania’s immigrant and mixed status families can take advantage of this expanded mobility—mobility that we often take for granted. It will allow families to live a better life, easing the strain of the everyday and essential chores that come with having a family.

Safer streets

We know that some immigrants already drive without a license but have not passed a test or taken any instruction to drive in Pennsylvania due to current restrictions. In 2011, the AAA Foundation wrote a report that found an increasing proportion of fatal crashes involved unlicensed drivers. The report also specified that about 85% of those unlicensed drivers were ages 16 to 64, eliminating the idea that most

unlicensed crashes are a result of underaged drivers.¹² Expanding access to driver's licenses will make our streets safer and also allow the state to hold people who are unsafe drivers accountable—and at cheaper cost as it is easier to conduct traffic stops with licensed rather than unlicensed drivers.

Privacy Concerns

The intention of expanding driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants is fueled by a desire to create a more equal state by allowing those who contribute to our communities to move freely. However, there are privacy concerns when it comes to expanding driver's license options to the undocumented population.

A newly released report details the ways entities like ICE can access all PennDOT data by simply filling out a request form.¹³ The report states that all the personal data that is required to attain a driver's license (including providing a form of ID) is stored with PennDOT and can be accessed easily. According to the report, PennDOT gives information on over 36 million driver's license and ID holders to several agencies, including ICE and private businesses. ICE can also access basic PennDOT information through JNET which is Pennsylvania's primary law enforcement information database.

For immigrants to move freely and feel comfortable acquiring driver's licenses, the private data that is stored by PennDOT should be limited to agencies only investigating criminal charges and require an official warrant. ICE's access to PennDOT information through JNET should be removed. The report also has policy recommendations surrounding PennDOT's sharing regulations with private companies and other agencies. Privacy is a crucial portion of the proposed expansion as without the proper privacy provisions in place, immigrant families risk arrest or potential deportation simply for wanting to drive with a license and insurance.

Conclusion

Prior to 2002, Pennsylvania allowed undocumented immigrants to apply for driver's licenses through a federal tax ID or through combinations of a foreign passport and a birth certificate. Sadly, the Commonwealth later chose to take a punitive approach regarding undocumented immigrants and changed its policy. We could—and should—allow undocumented immigrants access to driver's licenses again. We must keep in mind, however, that having separate, marked licenses for the undocumented population would be counterproductive as few people would apply for driver's licenses if it would lead to possible deportation.

A large number of undocumented immigrants live in Pennsylvania, hold jobs, pay taxes, and contribute to our economy. These same individuals are an integral part of our communities. Many have lived and worked in the United States for years. Many undocumented immigrants have come to America because local employers desperately need their help and rely on their hard work to make their businesses successful. Many of these individuals, workers and community members have children who are United

¹² For more analysis and information about driving statistics see, AAA Foundation Report, "Unlicensed to Kill", 2011: <https://www.adtsea.org/webfiles/fnitools/documents/aaa-unlicensed-to-kill.pdf>.

¹³ For more analysis on the use of PENNDOT private data, see Driving Pennsylvania Forward and Farmworker Legal Advocacy Clinic report, authored by Lauren Pugh, Grace Waweru, Sam England and Bernadette Berger, "Secure Our Data: Protecting the Privacy of Pennsylvania Residents and Drivers, September 2020; <file:///C:/Users/maisu/Downloads/Secure-Our-Data-Hit-the-Brakes-on-Information-Sharing.-Driving-PA-Forward-2020-1.pdf>

States citizens. Denying people a right to a driver's license will not lead undocumented immigrants to leave the country or prevent others from entering the U.S. Denying undocumented immigrants a driver's license plays no effective role in immigration policy. But it does make the life of undocumented immigrants more difficult and makes it harder for them to take care of their families and contribute to our economy.

Making Pennsylvania the 16th state to expand driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants would not only help undocumented immigrants, it would help all Pennsylvanians. Not only would it cost us nothing, it would marginally increase state revenues. And it would show respect for people who are a part of our Commonwealth yet are denied rights that we all take for granted.¹⁴

¹⁴ Driving PA Forward is a movement organized by the MILPA and other immigrant led organizations. For more information on their partners and strategies, please visit: <https://drivingpaforward.org/>