



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Adriano Espaillat

New York Elected Officials Push Legislation to Allow Undocumented Immigrants to Apply for a Driver's License

ADRIANO ESPAILLAT December 16, 2013



The number of deported immigrants under President Obama is approaching the 2 million mark and immigration reform has become once again no more than a rapidly-fading illusion. Yet, here in New York, some politicians and community leaders are working to alleviate the immigrants' situation by allowing the undocumented to legally apply for a driver's license.

"A driver's license will provide undocumented immigrants much more employment flexibility," said state Sen. José Peralta who, along with Sen. Adriano Espaillat and with the

support of Make the Road New York and other community groups, introduced legislation last October to provide undocumented New Yorkers access to driver's licenses. Espaillat had introduced a similar bill before that would have granted driving privileges only to DREAMers.

"My bill includes everyone and Espaillat supports it," Peralta said.

Although not on the original list of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Conference 10 priorities for 2014, made public in November, Peralta says he was reassured his bill would be added to the list.

"It will probably pass as soon as January," he said. "In moving out of the shadows and into the economic mainstream, immigrants will be less isolated and less vulnerable to predators and their scams."

Despite the failure of previous attempts to enact such a measure in New York State, the mood has changed for the better around the country, and now Peralta's bill is actually following a widening national trend.

As you may remember, a 2007 executive order by then-Gov. Eliot Spitzer directing state agencies to grant licenses to New York's approximately 500,000 undocumented immigrants provoked a fiery debate that ended up in political disaster for him. The backlash was such that the governor rescinded the order and introduced it as legislation — but the Senate did not pass it. Not one to give up easily, Spitzer put it into effect as an administrative measure at the DMV, but the protests did not diminish and he was forced to withdraw it.

Yet, remarkably, despite the continuous vitriol spewed by the GOP against immigrants within the past year, issuing licenses to the undocumented has been gaining rapid acceptance — the number of states taking such a step has jumped from three to 11.

It makes sense. Unlicensed drivers are five times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes and uninsured drivers are far more likely to flee the scene of an accident.

Peralta's bill will permit the state Department of Motor Vehicles to issue licenses to undocumented immigrants able to provide non-U.S. identification, prove residence in the state and demonstrate they have not been convicted of a felony crime.

"Now we need to talk to the Republicans in Albany, and I know this time they are interested in supporting this measure." Peralta said.

"This is an important issue for them. Next year is an election year and the number of their Hispanic constituents is growing."

The fact that Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio, contrary to Bloomberg, has come out in favor of allowing the undocumented to drive legally, is a powerful boost to Peralta's bill chances of being approved.

Also incoming police commissioner Bill Bratton supported a similar measure in 2007, while he was the top cop in Los Angeles, and is expected to do the same in New York City.

"This legislation will also help make all New Yorkers safer by allowing us to identify everyone who drives on our roads and ensure that they are properly credentialed, educated and operating registered, inspected and insured vehicles," Peralta said.

-Albor Ruiz, New York Daily News