

**STATE OF MICHIGAN**  
**INTERAGENCY MIGRANT SERVICES COMMITTEE**

August 26, 2015

Richard D. McLellan, Chair  
Michigan Law Revision Commission

Re: Driver's Licenses, State Identification, and Migrant Farmworkers

Dear Chairman McLellan:

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this meeting and to present on this subject. As the chairman of the Interagency Migrant Services Committee (IMSC) and the Director of Migrant Affairs for the Department of Health and Human Services, I encounter the issue of access to a driver's license for applicants without proof of immigration status primarily with respect to migrant farmworkers and their agricultural employers.

In meeting with migrant farmworkers and agricultural employers, both groups have cited the 2008 elimination of driver's licenses for those not legally present as contributing to the subsequent shortage in migrant farmworkers. Both groups have also advocated for the return to the pre-2008 driver's license policy.

The extent of the decline in the number of migrant farmworkers coming to Michigan between 2008 and the present can be approximated in a recently published report (*A Vanishing Breed*) by the Partnership for a New American Economy which found that between 2002 and 2014 the number of hours worked by field and crop workers declined by 8.1% in the Great Lakes Region (MI, MN, WI). This contrasted with a 19.4% *increase* in the Pacific Region of Oregon and Washington. It is notable that Washington state, one of Michigan's agricultural competitors, has issued driver's licenses and identification cards to undocumented residents since 1999. This indicates that there may be a correlation between expansive driver's license policies and the ability to attract migrant farmworkers.

The extent of the decline can also be seen by examining two enumeration studies, in 2006 and 2013, commissioned by the IMSC. These studies, which sought to quantify the number of migrants, seasonal farmworkers, and their families in the state of Michigan, found that the number of migrant farmworkers declined by 8% from 2006 (35,148) to 2013 (32, 337).

The 2013 enumeration study attributed the decline in the number of migrant farmworkers to several factors including immigration-related fears. Migrant farmworkers are “afraid to move around or apply for services as they are concerned about possible apprehension and deportation for themselves or their family members”. Another related factor cited by the study was the 2008 changes to Michigan’s driver license requirements. The study reported that migrants without proof of legal residence were fearful of driving which limited their ability to work and to move between jobs.

The study makes clear that migrant families with undocumented family members are increasingly fearful of traveling and are thus more likely to “settle out”. Where they choose to settle out depends on several factors including whether steady work is available. Having access to a driver’s license is a key component to their ability to attain and retain such steady work. In addition, those with a driver’s license are more attractive to agricultural employers, especially where a migrant is able to be licensed to operate trucks, tractors, forklifts and other heavy machinery.

Another factor in deciding where to settle out are the attitudes of the state’s population and law enforcement toward immigrants. Access to a valid identification and/or a driver’s license would help farmworkers to be less isolated, less likely to be exploited, and more integrated in their communities and allow for more constructive relationships with local law enforcement.

Another important factor to the decision of where to settle out is how welcoming the state’s policies are toward immigrants. Being able to get a driver’s license is a key piece to their feeling welcome – a fact that 9 other states, including our neighbor Illinois and our agricultural competitor Washington, have recognized by providing driver’s licenses without regard to immigration status.

The success of Michigan’s agricultural economy depends on migrant farmworkers choosing to come to Michigan and for those deciding to settle out to choose to do so in Michigan. Restoring access to driver’s licenses without regard to immigration status would greatly assist in this objective.

Thank you for your consideration of this vital issue.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dale Flores Freeman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dale Flores Freeman  
Chairman, Interagency Migrant Services Committee  
Director, Office of Migrant Affairs