

★ Seeking access to licenses

Panel: Undocumented immigrants driving legally can make roads safer

BY ROBERT BRODSKY
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Allowing undocumented residents to obtain driver's licenses would make Long Island roads safer while providing a steady stream of new revenue to the state, advocates and fiscal watchdogs said Tuesday.

New York State currently prohibits undocumented immigrants from obtaining a driver's license, a barrier to attending many day-to-day activities, including work, school and medical appointments.

Legislation under consideration by Albany lawmakers would allow the state Department of Motor Vehicles to process licenses for undocu-

mented immigrants while prohibiting the information from being shared with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

At a forum Tuesday at Hofstra University, immigrant rights advocates argued that the measure, known as Green Light New York, is both a moral imperative and smart economic policy.

"For many Long Islanders, having access to a driver's license is not a luxury; it's a necessity," said Eliana Fernandez, lead organizer for Make the Road New York, in Brentwood.

Roughly 265,000 undocumented immigrants statewide, including an estimated 51,000



Patrick Young of Central American Refugee Center



Jonas Shaende of Fiscal Policy Institute

on Long Island, would be eligible to obtain a driver's license through the bill, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute, a progressive think tank.

Jonas Shaende, chief economist for the Institute, said the measure would generate \$57 million in annual revenue for the state, while local governments on Long Island would see \$2.6 million per year in additional sales taxes and vehicle use tax fees.

The measure, he said, would also improve safety by ensuring that many undocumented immigrants already on the road are properly trained, tested and fully insured.

"Once people are not living and driving in fear, they act like normal people; they act responsibly," Shaende said. "And if you

have policies of suppression and fear, then of course they will act in ways that are shortsighted and harmful."

Patrick Young, program director of the Central American Refugee Center, said New York State should not be in the business of immigration enforcement.

"Immigrants are still driving, even if they don't have a license," Young said. "But when they drive they know that if the police stop them they run the risk of potentially being detained or being held long enough for ICE to come and arrest them."

Few states had restrictions on licenses for undocumented immigrants until the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In 2002, then-Gov. George Pataki issued an ex-

ecutive order prohibiting the distribution of driver's licenses to those in the country illegally to safeguard against terrorists securing IDs.

The Green Light legislation has the backing of many Assembly Democrats but does not yet have enough support in the Democrat-controlled State Senate, including from most Republicans or any member of the Long Island delegation.

Opponents of the measure argue that a license could provide undocumented immigrants with access to services for which they are not entitled.

A dozen states and the District of Columbia already issue licenses to those in the country illegally.

NIFA approves only half of borrowing for capital projects

BY SCOTT EIDLER
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The Nassau Interim Finance Authority Tuesday approved only half of Nassau County's request to borrow for a slew of capital projects after staff learned that the projects' contracts lacked NIFA approval — a surprise action the panel's chairman described as "tough love" that delays borrowing for millions to resurface county roads.

Nassau's financial control panel was considering approval of more than \$74 million in borrowing, including money to upgrade voter equipment to accommodate early voting, renovation of the Family & Matrimonial Court, and funding for the Nassau County police academy and patrol cars. But NIFA coun-

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— NIFA Chairman Adam Barsky

sel Jeremy Wise said that shortly before the meeting, officials discovered that the agency's staff had not reviewed underlying contracts for half

the spending.

NIFA officials cited a long-standing policy of only approving borrowing after contracts were approved by the agency's staff. NIFA board member Christopher Wright said the policy was followed under the administration of former County Executive Edward Mangano and was needed "to maintain proper oversight."

Deputy County Executive for Finance Raymond Orlando said after the meeting that county officials were first informed of the contract issue just two hours before the evening meeting.

He argued to NIFA directors that the order of approvals for the contracts and then the borrowing was not relevant. "I don't believe the order of contract first is necessarily serving

the taxpayers and residents of the county well."

NIFA Chairman Adam Barsky said after the panel of directors' 6-0 vote: "I understand that the county . . . [may] prefer it another way, but we've had this process in place for a long time. I think that it's . . . tough love."

In theory, the county could have raised money that will sit in its coffers if NIFA were to ultimately reject the contracts, Wise said.

But Orlando told NIFA directors, "I can assure you that the road resurfacing money will be spent."

NIFA advised county officials to cover the projects — mostly for road resurfacing — with existing funds and get reimbursed later. NIFA meets next in three weeks, when

county officials can re-seek the approvals.

In an interview afterward, Orlando said, "I don't believe that the policy has been consistently applied on this matter." He said the county will now have to borrow twice, a move that would drive up the county's expenditures.

NIFA authorized borrowing for about \$36 million worth of projects, including:

- The Nassau County Police Academy, \$6.7 million
- Police fleet replacement, \$3.4 million
- Vehicle purchases for Sheriff's Department, \$1 million

It did not approve \$6.4 million in funding to renovate the court, \$3.7 million for voter machine upgrades, and \$91,000 for upgrades to its rifle and pistol range in Uniondale.