

Dream Act immigrants eligible for Nevada driver's licenses

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Immigrants brought to the country illegally as children and granted a [temporary reprieve](#) by President Barack Obama this summer will be eligible for Nevada driver's licenses and state IDs, state officials told the Sun this week.

And Gov. Brian Sandoval supports the policy, he said in a statement.

That brought a sigh of relief from immigration advocates.

But at least one Republican lawmaker said the Nevada Legislature should weigh in on the question when it meets in early 2013.

By some estimates, Nevada is home to 20,000 young immigrants brought to the country illegally as children who qualify for the “deferred action for childhood arrivals” — a program informally known as [Dream Act](#)-lite after the broader legislation that has failed to pass Congress.

“These individuals will not be treated any differently under Nevada law than any other noncitizen applying for an identification card or driver’s license,” said Kevin Malone, a spokesman for the [Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles](#).

Whether to issue driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants is a traditionally controversial political hot button. But for the so-called Dreamers, it's a potentially life-changing issue.

Astrid Silva, an immigration advocate who was brought to Nevada illegally by her parents when she was 3 years old, said she and other undocumented immigrants have had to rely on friends, family and public transportation to get around Las Vegas — or risk it and drive illegally.

Silva, 24, applied for deferred action earlier this month.

“I’ll be learning to drive soon,” she said. “It’s a huge deal.”

Other states, such as Arizona and Nebraska, have maintained they will continue to deny illegal immigrants driver’s licenses, even those who qualify for deferred action.

But Nevada officials said the state will honor the “employment authorization card,” Malone said. That’s a photo ID issued by the Department of Homeland Security to the deferred action applicants, according to immigration attorneys.

Those cards had been issued to other noncitizens in the country legally and have been accepted by the DMV since at least 1999, Malone said.

In a statement, Sandoval said he had no intention of changing that policy.

“As long as all of the DMV procedures are followed and other forms of identification are valid, I support this policy,” he said.

Immigration experts had been unsure whether the Nevada DMV would accept the employment authorization cards issued to those who received deferred action.

“There is not a clear rule on it, and it could vary from office to office,” said Angela Morrison, a visiting assistant professor at UNLV who had served as the legal director of the Nevada Immigrant Resource Project at the Boyd School of Law.

But not everyone believes issuing driver’s licenses to Dreamers is a good idea.

Driver’s licenses can be used for a wide range of purposes, including registering to vote, said Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden.

“If any individual doesn’t have full status, to me, they shouldn’t have a full driver's license,” Settelmeyer said. “A lot of facets need to be discussed at the Legislature. I, myself, do not prefer to see an agency head make a decision that has such large repercussions.”

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