

Illegal immigrant driver's licenses bill sent to governor

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1:35 p.m. CST, January 8, 2013

SPRINGFIELD --- The Illinois House today approved a measure to allow illegal immigrants to get temporary driver's licenses, sending it to a supportive Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn.

The 65-46 vote came after a lengthy debate in which backers and foes laid out their cases.

Rep. Dennis Reboletti, R-Elmhurst, cited numerous concerns about public safety. Opponents questioned why fingerprinting isn't part of the legislation. Republican Rep. Randy Ramey of DuPage County said too many issues are left unanswered.

"There are going to be far too many people who will get these cards," Ramey said. "There'll be fraud, abuse."

House Republican leader Tom Cross, however, supported the measure saying Illinois should be a place welcoming to immigrants "who want to work, who want to be part of our communities. We should work with them, not fight with them."

The bill, backed by Quinn, who said he would sign it, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, would let an estimated 250,000 illegal immigrants get three-year renewable licenses.

To become eligible for a license, a person would have to live in Illinois for at least a year, a provision that would require applicants to provide a copy of a lease, utility bills and the like. Under current law, people without a Social Security number or proper documentation to be in the country cannot get a driver's license and often have trouble getting car insurance.

The licenses could not be used for other identification purposes, such as for boarding a plane, buying a gun or voting.

Supporters said they expected the vote to be close in the House, where a committee advanced the bill Monday. The Senate already had approved the measure.

During Monday's hearing, opponents questioned why there was no fingerprinting involved with the temporary licenses to ensure that those who apply are not lying about their identity.

"Without these basic public safety and Illinois security safeguards, this bill's unsafe," Hanover Park police Chief David Webb said.

"This is a two-prong issue: It's not only about highway safety, but it's also homeland security issues."

Acevedo said fingerprinting would add "phenomenal" cost to the program.

Fred Tsao, policy director with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, said fingerprinting might scare off eligible applicants.

The House transportation panel sent the proposal to the full House on a 6-3 vote. That led supporters to chant, "Si se puede," which roughly translates to "Yes, we can."

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/clout/chi-illegal-immigrant-drivers-licenses-debated-in-illinois-house-20130108,0,3998409.story>