

# Illinois moves to give drivers licenses to illegal immigrants

By Joanne von Alroth

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois | Tue Dec 4, 2012 6:33pm EST

(Reuters) - Illinois took a major step on Tuesday toward granting drivers licenses to illegal immigrants, which would make it the most populous U.S. state to allow undocumented migrants to legally drive.

The Democratic-controlled state Senate voted 41-14 to approve licenses for illegal immigrants to raucous cheers from Hispanics in the legislative gallery.

If the measure becomes law, Illinois would join only two other states, Washington and [New Mexico](#), in granting such drivers licenses. Utah allows driving permits.

On January 1, California will allow immigrants with federal work permits to receive licenses.

After taking drubbing at the polls last month when Democratic President [Barack Obama](#) won re-election with 66 percent of Hispanics backing his bid, more than half of the Illinois Senate's Republicans supported the proposal.

At a press conference, Illinois state Senate Republican leader Christine Radogno, and House Republican leader Tom Cross said Illinois could no longer ignore the presence of illegal immigrants, who are driving without licenses and insurance.

"They are here and they are with us, some of them not even of their own volition. But I guess we expect these people to ride their bicycles to work," Radogno said.

The measure is expected to be voted on in the Democratic-controlled House on Wednesday. If it passes the House, Democratic Governor Pat Quinn is expected to sign the legislation.

Some Republicans in Washington also have begun to soften their opposition to immigration reform.

Republican senators from Texas and Arizona last month proposed what they called a compromise plan to offer visas to children brought to the United States by their illegal immigrant parents. The plan by Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and Jon Kyl is intended as a Republican alternative to the Democrats' "Dream Act," which would grant citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants.

Unlicensed, uninsured drivers are involved in almost 80,000 accidents in Illinois annually, resulting in \$660 million in damage, according to the Illinois Highway Safety Coalition. Unlicensed immigrant drivers cost \$64 million in damage claims.

The measure would extend to undocumented immigrants Illinois' existing temporary visitor driver's license, used by legal immigrants. The licenses are "visually distinct" from ordinary licenses, with a purple background and the words "not valid for identification" on the front, explained Lawrence Benito, chief executive of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

State Farm Insurance, a major insurer headquartered in Illinois, said in a statement that the legislation could present issues for insurance companies in assessing the driving record of illegal immigrants, but the company would implement the law.

"Just because you have a driver's license of any kind doesn't mean you'll get insurance," said spokeswoman Missy Dundov. "We have to consider all the information available."

The Illinois Safer Families Coalition, an organization that opposes giving drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants, ran an ad this week saying Illinois politicians cannot be trusted to administer such a program without corruption.

Coalition spokesman Bill Kelly cited Ricardo Guzman, a truck driver who illegally obtained a driver's license in Illinois and was involved in a 1994 crash that killed six people. It was later discovered that Guzman had bribed an Illinois state official to get the driver's license.

"I'm afraid that this bill, this poorly thought-through bill, is going to result in similar tragedies," Kelly said.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the number of Latinos in Illinois was more than 2 million, or nearly 16 percent of the population. Lawmakers estimated about 250,000 illegal immigrants drive in Illinois.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/04/us-usa-immigration-illinois-idUSBRE8B31BM20121204>