

# Support Human Rights to Mobility and Access to Transportation!

## Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor in Support of Access to Licenses/ID for All VT Residents!

[www.migrantjustice.net](http://www.migrantjustice.net)

*"Now I feel like a prisoner. With a license I wouldn't because I could come and go as I need." –VT dairy worker*

### I need a driver's license/ID because:

- "As human beings, with or without papers, we all have rights."
- "Living without a license in rural VT you are trapped, stuck, you have no power and are forced to suffer abuses."
- "To feel free and like I'm not in a jail, to demonstrate that I am equal to everyone else, that I too need to go to the store or go to the hospital without waiting until someone else drives me or charges me a lot of money."
- "Like many people we work really hard and sometimes even double the hours so that others can have a glass a milk, a piece of cheese, or an ice cream."
- "As workers we deserve the same right to health care and right to access a driver's license....We get sick like everyone else and no one can take us to the doctors."
- "Hard work deserves respect, all people deserve respect, we live like this because the system is broken, the time has come to change this..."

*-Migrant Justice farmworker members*

### Why write letters to the editor?

We want to show public support for access to driver's licenses/ID and human rights of all our communities. We want to turn the tide from criminalization, discrimination and scapegoating towards our shared humanity, our common cause, our inherent dignity and rights as humans.

### More Background & Talking Points:

- A driver's license provides essential mobility in our rural state to fulfill fundamental human needs and rights to access health care, food, transportation, housing, and work. It also increases power/mobility to leave abusive situations including exploitative work conditions or domestic violence.
- Without any available legal status and living in one of the whitest and most rural states in the country many migrant dairy workers are converted into virtual prisoners.
- Vermont has taken important steps with Bias-Free Policing. With access to License/ID immigrants would feel more comfortable contacting police, especially



as crime victims or witnesses, and police can easily identify and verify license/ID holders' when needed. This makes ALL communities safer.

- Independent and mobile workers, who aren't forced to rely on employers or human traffickers to meet fundamental human needs is a win-win for employees and employers.
- There are absolutely no federal laws, including the REAL ID Act, that prohibit Vermont from extending access to driver's licenses. Two states (New Mexico and Washington) provide such access without violating federal law or losing federal funding. Vermont can and must stand up for the dignity of all our residents.
- Migrant Justice will continue to work for immigration reform at the federal level BUT even in the very best case scenarios we are years away from implementation. Meanwhile, there is an **urgent need and responsibility** to act NOW at the state level to ensure all residents access fundamental human needs.

*"Those of us who have gone to the State House in support of access to driver's licenses and ID cards for our community have simply come to Vermont to work. We don't believe we are doing any harm to anyone. We help the economy of this state; we pay taxes, and yet don't even receive tax returns. We are here by necessity to be able to have a better future where we come from. I am from Chiapas, Mexico, where there is little opportunity to earn enough money. ... We are human beings. We deserve basic human rights. Laws should treat all people fairly, but unfortunately many laws are discriminatory."*

*-Jose, farm worker and Migrant Justice member, Addison County, VT*

## Sample Letters

### **Let Them Drive 1/09/2013**

I am writing in response to the Facing Facts regarding driver's licenses for undocumented Vermonters [December 19]. Though it was a short sentence with a small icon — a frowning face — it carries weight with public opinion and has done an injustice to the true issues involved. The committee's endorsement of expanding access to Vermont driver's licenses deserves nothing less than a big smiley face.

Migrant farmworkers work long hours supporting our dairy farms, isolated geographically and socially. Without a driver's license, they must rely on their employers to get to a grocery store, a health clinic, an emergency room, a bank, their place of worship and everywhere else, including the opportunity to leave abusive situations.

Many common misconceptions and fears about expanding access to driver's licenses are not accurate. Undocumented residents cannot just get a foreign license and use it here. Vermont is not creating something new. This has been done successfully in the state of Washington, which was also the first state to be certified as REAL ID compliant. It is unacceptable that some of our Vermont neighbors — who do the very work that preserves our state's cultural identity — suffer such a violation of fundamental human rights. Expanding access to driver's licenses enhances the quality of life for us all and diminishes the rights the rights of no one.—Corey Mallon

### Safe Driving Towards Human Rights 1/14/2013

The Jan. 7th article "Law enforcement groups hesitant on marijuana, driver's license bills" leaves out key aspects of the story behind pending legislation that would extend access to driver's licenses to undocumented Vermont residents. It is puzzling that Brickell and Clark claim that "there has been no reach out to law enforcement" when Keith Flynn, the VT Public Safety Commissioner, was one of eight members of a legislative study committee that after months of study recommended in December that lawmakers move ahead with the driver's license bill. The committee found that the licenses could in fact enhance public safety. First of all, the ability to drive can provide a way out of abusive situations. Having a form of identification also helps people—regardless of immigration status—feel more comfortable contacting the police, especially as crime victims or witnesses. Additionally, the written and practical tests necessary for obtaining a license could improve safe driving, and licenses would enable undocumented people to buy insurance, which is in the best interest of everyone on the roads. The men and women who labor in this state's fields and dairy farms have not come here to "[put] the lives and safety of Vermonters at risk." They have come seeking economic opportunity that simply does not exist in their home communities. Above all, access to driver's licenses is a matter of human rights. A license provides the mobility in our rural state that allows us to access fundamental needs like food and health care—rights that transcend citizenship.—Roxanne Rapaport

### Whose side are you on?

The farm families amongst my neighbors and friends are hard-working and honorable people. So too are the men and women who risk life and limb crossing the border to work for and with them. I fail to see the wisdom in their prosecution as they toil to keep our fragile farm economy afloat. I am unimpressed with the indignant fanning of the flames of intolerance and inhospitality towards those who make it possible for our farmers to milk their cows and secure their crops.

From my perspective our agri-business centered agricultural policy is responsible for much of the demise of our family farms. It is also agri-business serving "free-trade" policies that caused the Mexican farms of many of our now Vermont farm-workers to have failed. That they should now be persecuted a second time for their willingness to help maintain our own besieged farms seems a foolish, cruel and ironic injustice. It is surely a higher calling to stand with our farmers both native and from afar than to profess blind obedience to legal statutes that no longer serve us or our communities.--Robin Cappuccino, West Wheelock, Vermont (submitted to Caledonia Record)

### Drivers Licenses for Migrant Workers 4/5/2012

...We arrived in Room 11 of the State House, which was thankfully filled with bi-lingual people, and we spent the morning connecting with our senators and encouraging them to support the driver's license bill. It is not an immigration issue as much as it is a human rights issue, I've decided. We cannot, in good conscience, benefit from the labor of these migrant workers and turn a blind eye to the fact that our laws constrain their freedom of movement among us.

As a Christian I hear the voice of God's judgment against such policies: "I will draw near to you for judgment and will offer a swift witness against those who oppress the hired worker, against those who thrust aside the sojourner." As an American I hear the voice of our founders saying, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As a Charlotter, I hear the voice of my daughter asking, "Why do the farm workers have to hide from us, Dad?" They shouldn't have to hide from us, and this bill would be an important step toward inviting them to come out of the shadows and be fellow residents among us. --Rev. Will Burhans (Submitted to Charlotte News;

<http://www.thecharlottenews.org/pages/driverslicensesformigrantworkers.html> )

### **Some Pointers on Letters to the Editor:**

### ***Send us a copy of your letters!***

- \* When possible, submit a letter in response to a particular article, and reference that article in your letter.
- \* Submit a letter to your local paper as well as to more widely distributed papers (such as the Burlington Free Press, the Times Argus, The Rutland Herald, and Seven Days).
- \* Keep it short and simple: often a shorter letter is more likely to be published.
- \* Stick to one topic and highlight a few main points, including how the issue affects the community.
- \* Make your letter personal and from the heart. Why do you care? What's your connection to this?
- \* Re-read, rewrite, and edit your letter. Send us a copy for feedback.
- \*\*Be especially conscious of the language you use when talking about people who are undocumented. Words like "illegal immigrant" and "illegal alien" stigmatize people and connote a second-class status. Remember: we are all human, and the campaign to extend access to drivers' licenses to all Vermonters is a matter of human rights.

**For more information contact Migrant Justice:** [www.migrantjustice.net](http://www.migrantjustice.net) \* [info@migrantjustice.net](mailto:info@migrantjustice.net)

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