



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-1196
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Gina M. Raimondo
Governor

October 6, 2017

TO THE HONORABLE, THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

In accordance with the provisions of Article IX, Section 14 of the Constitution of the State of Rhode Island and Section 43-1-4 of the Rhode Island General Laws, I transmit, with my disapproval, 2017-H 5684 Substitute A, "An Act Relating to Motor and Other Vehicles – Operators' and Chauffers' Licenses."

Under current Rhode Island law, nonresidents aged sixteen (16) and older who hold a valid driver's license issued by another country have the right to operate motor vehicles in our state. The Geneva Convention on Road Traffic of 1949 permits any driver over age eighteen (18) holding a valid license issued by a signatory to the Convention to drive in another signatory country "without further examination." Section 31-10-2 of the Rhode Island General Laws extends this privilege to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds.

The aim of 2017-H 5684 Substitute A is to provide certain nonresidents in our state on a work or study visa (and who already have the right to drive in our state) with a Rhode Island driver's license (in addition to the license from their country of origin) without requiring them to take any written or road test. This is a laudable goal, as these individuals have already demonstrated the ability to operate a motor vehicle safely in their home countries and this legislation would therefore eliminate these steps in the process of obtaining a Rhode Island driver's license. Unfortunately, this bill creates an unnecessarily restrictive and confusing statutory scheme that curtails existing privileges for international visitors rather than expanding them.

First, this legislation reintroduces written and road tests to nonresidents who are sixteen (16) or seventeen (17) years of age and who have already qualified to operate motor vehicles. This significantly inconveniences the gifted young people who come to Rhode Island to attend our educational institutions by burdening them with duplicative and time-consuming procedures.

Second, this legislation requires an individual to be in possession of an active visa issued by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), overlooking the fact that work and study visas are also issued by the United States Department of State. As such, this bill would result in an arbitrary system in which individuals who received their visas from USCIS can take

advantage of the provisions of this legislation and those who received them from the Department of State or another duly authorized agency cannot.

Third, many visitors under work and study visas renew these visas several times during their stay. Under the terms of this legislation, visitors' Rhode Island driver's licenses would expire upon the expiration of the visitors' visas. Therefore, these individuals would not be allowed to drive during the pendency of their renewal applications, even though they are lawfully present, simply because their issued visas expired and they have not yet received new visas.

Finally, this legislation is drafted to include lawful permanent residents who are lawfully authorized to live permanently in the United States. As lawful permanent residents are regularly required to renew their green cards, they also would have no valid driver's licenses during renewal periods, even though they have been granted the right to reside in this country permanently.

I fully support the idea of having a simple, transparent, and uniform system for reciprocal recognition of operator licenses between Rhode Island and other countries. It is good policy for economic development and for our educational institutions. The specific drafting challenges that prevent this bill from meeting that aim have been raised by more than thirty advocacy organizations and immigration attorneys across the state. These groups and individuals have been unanimous in asking for my veto of this legislation. They have also offered their firm support for the intended purpose of the legislation and for working to correct the concerns they have identified. We must ensure that the driving privilege contemplated by this legislation is provided fairly, administered properly, and appropriately tailored so that its laudable aim may be met.

For these reasons, I disapprove of this legislation and respectfully urge your support of this veto.

Sincerely,



Gina M. Raimondo
Governor