NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

LA archbishop: Driver's license law shows commitment to immigrants

Mike Nelson Catholic News Service | Oct. 7, 2013 Immigration and the Church
Los Angeles

A landmark measure granting California driver's licenses to people who are in the country illegally represents an important commitment to immigrants, said Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez.

The archbishop said he hopes the bill, which Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law Thursday, will lead the way to comprehensive immigration reform in the United States.

"Driving is one of the basic necessities of life," said Gomez during the signing ceremony that day at Los Angeles City Hall. "So this new law is going to make a big difference for millions of people in their everyday lives. It will make it easier for them to get to work, to go to school, to go the store, to get to church. This bill will make our families, our communities and our economy stronger."

The law goes into effect no later than Jan. 1, 2015, and calls upon the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue driver's licenses to those in the country illegally who can prove their identities, have established California residency and pass driving exams.

It was approved Sept. 12 by votes of 28-8 in the California Senate and 55-19 in the Assembly.

The licenses would have the initials "DP" (for driver's privilege), rather than "DL" (driver's license), and would state that the document "does not establish eligibility for employment or public benefit." The DMV will decide what documentation is required to obtain a driver's license.

Additionally, driver's licenses issued under this law "shall not be used as evidence of the holder's citizenship or immigration status," nor shall they be used "as a basis for a criminal investigation, arrest or detention."

Gomez thanked Brown and Assemblyman Luis Alejo of Watsonville, sponsor of the measure, for their "leadership and commitment to our poor and working poor, especially our immigrants." But, he added, "as good as this legislation is, it's still only a half-measure.

"Our nation's immigration system is totally broken," he said. "Sacramento (California's capital) can't fix that problem. Only Washington can. We need immigration reform that keeps families together, that gives rights to workers, and that provides a generous path to citizenship.

"So let's keep working together with our leaders in Washington for reform that is real and comprehensive -- so all our brothers and sisters can join us in the promise of America, and so they can live with the dignity that God intends for them."

The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles was among the organizations that celebrated the signing into of the legislation.

"The state legislature and the governor recognize a driver's license makes our roads safer and offers a practical

tool any Californian, regardless of immigration status, can use to conduct everyday tasks that greatly contribute to our state's growth," said Angelica Salas, the coalition's executive director.

The measure, Salas added, "is not a perfect bill, but it keeps millions of California drivers from having their cars impounded (and) face stiff penalties and court fees, and because every driver must pass a written and driving exam, is likely to make roads safer for everyone."

Moreover, she called upon both Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Congress to collaborate in passing legislation. "When doing the people's work is the expectation and not the rarest of gems, our nation is better for it," she said.

The legislation cites a recent report published in the journal Accident Analysis and Prevention, which asserted that the DMV estimates that 12 percent of the drivers on the road do not have valid driver's licenses. "In the state of California," the legislation said, "there are potentially 1.4 million drivers who are unlicensed and uninsured."

[Mike Nelson is editor in chief of *The Tidings*, newspaper of the Los Angeles archdiocese.]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-06-30 06:03*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/immigration-and-church/la-archbishop-drivers-license-law-shows-commitment-immigrants