

DRIVER'S LICENSE BILL IS ASKING FOR FRAUD;

GOOD INTENTIONS, BAD LEGISLATION

San Jose Mercury News (California)

August 27, 2003 Wednesday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. 10B

Length: 533 words

Byline: MERCURY NEWS EDITORIAL

Body

California's Legislature is poised to approve legislation that has a virtuous veneer -- issuing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants -- but a dangerous security hole large enough to allow for widespread identity fraud.

With his political career and the support of Latino and union groups in the balance, Gov. Gray Davis is eager to sign a bill granting 2 million undocumented immigrants the right to a driver's license.

Too eager. By declaring a month ago he'd sign the bill, Davis greased the process for legislation that fails to meet demands he listed a year ago when he vetoed a similar bill.

Lying for a license

Here's the hole in the process: The bill still would enable individuals -- not just immigrants -- to get a license or multiple licenses by lying about who they are.

Barring last minute delays, the bill may go before the Assembly on Thursday, then return to the Senate. Unless senators have second thoughts, a bad bill with good intentions will become law.

California should become the third state, after Utah and New Mexico, to let undocumented immigrants drive legally, but must do so in a way that eliminates security risks.

A revised version of SB 60 is supposed to eliminate that problem by requiring the Department of Motor Vehicles to purchase digital ID technology for \$50 million to \$65 million, which higher license and motor vehicle fees would pay for.

Anyone seeking a new driver's license or renewing a permit in person would submit a fingerprint, which would be scanned for duplicates. The current system, which requires a thumbprint, can't do systemwide matches.

New technology is overdue. The problem is that it'll take five to 10 years for Californians renewing their licenses to be entered into the database. That's a big window for abuse.

Under current law, an applicant must submit a Social Security number, which is issued only to citizens. To accommodate immigrants, Sen. Gil Cedillo's bill would permit the substitution of a individual taxpayer ID number, issued by the federal Internal Revenue Service. However, Motor Vehicles cannot verify tax ID numbers, because the IRS doesn't share the information.

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Here's how easy it would be to commit **fraud**: A person would submit a false name -- maybe your name -- and a fake taxpayer ID number, along with a fingerprint. Only a person with a print already in the system would attract notice. Once issued, the **license** would be widely accepted as reliable identification.

Cedillo's **bill** theoretically would make forgeries harder by requiring more documentation, including a birth certificate and a passport or consular ID. But a **licensing** system is only as effective as its weakest link, and some of these documents can easily be forged.

Davis bailed out

Last year's **bill** had stronger protections: a criminal background check and a prerequisite that an immigrant seek residency. This year, Davis should have started discussions with those requirements. Instead of driving negotiations, he bailed out on them.

Driver's licenses have become domestic passports; the system must be tamper-proof. The Legislature is poised to pass a **bill** that doesn't meet that standard.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: **LEGISLATION** (92%); IMMIGRATION (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); **DRIVERS LICENSES** (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); **FRAUD** & FINANCIAL CRIME (89%); **LICENSES** & PERMITS (89%); FINGERPRINTING (89%); TAXES & TAXATION (89%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (78%); BACKGROUND CHECKS (78%); IDENTITY THEFT (78%); VETO (78%); IDENTIFICATION TECHNOLOGIES (77%); COUNTERFEITING & FORGERY (72%); APPROVALS (58%)

Industry: **DRIVERS LICENSES** (90%)

Geographic: CALIFORNIA, USA (93%)

Load-Date: August 15, 2005