

## **Young illegal immigrants will be eligible for California driver's licenses**

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### **Body**

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**California** **will** issue **driver's licenses** to hundreds of thousands of **young illegal immigrants** once the Obama administration grants them work permits, a move that could reignite a divisive debate that has simmered for nearly 20 years.

The state's decision is the opposite from Arizona's, where Republican Gov. Jan Brewer signed an executive order outlawing **driver's licenses** for anyone who benefits from the new federal deportation relief.

The starkly different responses show that the benefits of the federal directive could vary depending on where **immigrants** live.

The Obama administration left it to states to decide whether to issue **driver's licenses** and offer in-state college tuition rates and other services to people who came here illegally as children but now are **eligible** for work permits.

Arizona was the first to say no, and **California** -- home to more than 400,000 **young immigrants** expected to qualify -- was one of the first to say yes when deportation relief became available this week.

Muzaffar Chishti of the Migration Policy Institute expects a flurry of activity in state capitals this month as governors and lawmakers follow the lines drawn by **California** and Arizona.

"Immigration is a federal issue," Chishti said. "How you treat **immigrants** within your state is a state issue."

**Licenses** also are purely a state matter, another expert said.

"The Constitution says nothing about **driver's licenses**," said Jacob Vigdor, a professor at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy. "Back in the 1780s it wasn't an issue. So it's completely at the discretion of states."

And, Vigdor said, the federal directive launched this week to help **illegal immigrant** students or high school graduates who are 30 or **younger** is accentuating the divide between some states' "anti-**immigrant**" climate and the "permissive, much more pragmatic" **California** approach.

**California's** 1993 ban on **driver's licenses** for **illegal immigrants** stands, but the DMV **will** treat as "temporary legal residents" those who qualify for deportation relief, DMV spokesman Mike Marando said Wednesday.

"**California** law is not changing. ... However, those applicants approved by (the U.S. Department of Homeland Security) **will** become temporary legal residents," Marando said.

That did not sit well with Southern **California** Assemblyman Tim Donnelly, R-Hesperia.

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"I think there's going to be a huge debate right here in California over that very issue," said Donnelly, a vocal opponent of illegal immigration. "The vast majority of Californians are adamantly opposed to giving driver's licenses to illegals."

Sixty-two percent of Californians opposed granting licenses to undocumented immigrants in 2005, the last time the Field Poll surveyed opinions on the topic. Californians then were evenly divided over a "different kind" of license that labeled them as nonresidents.

Now, young immigrants with a job permit and Social Security card can prove legal residency to the DMV, Marando said.

Immigrant advocates celebrated California's move and denounced Arizona's.

Driving is essential for many California and Arizona workers, especially farmworkers who travel far following crops, said Diana Tellefson Torres of the United Farm Workers Foundation.

Having licenses will let them move around freely without fear, she said.

A few states allow illegal immigrants to drive and others have no policy, but California is among the majority denying licenses to illegal residents.

Many such immigrants drive anyway, despite the risk of deportation, criminal charges, car impoundments and expensive penalties.

California's 1993 license prohibition applied to people who could not prove they were "a citizen or legal resident of the United States under federal law." Signed by Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, the driving ban was a precursor to 1994's voter-approved Proposition 187, which excluded illegal immigrants from public schools and other services.

Judges overturned most of Proposition 187, but the driver ban has lasted nearly two decades despite some Democratic lawmakers' perennial attempts to overturn it.

Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in 2003 repealed the ban before voters recalled him. Weeks later, new Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature restored it.

Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, has fought for 15 years to repeal the 1993 law and wants all undocumented immigrants to be able to drive legally.

"Every motorist in California should be licensed, tested and insured," he said. "That was our policy for 60 years."

## Graphic

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Itzel Guillen, left, sorts out some of the documents she needs to apply for a work permit along with Lucero Maganda, right, at her home Wednesday, Aug. 15, 2012, in San Diego. Guillen and Maganda are among those hoping for the right to work legally in America without being deported. The Obama Administration's Dream Act, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, could expand the rights of more than 1 million young illegal immigrants. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull)

Itzel Guillen, left, sorts out some of the documents she needs to apply for a work permit along with Lucero Maganda, right, at her home Wednesday, Aug. 15, 2012, in San Diego. Guillen and Maganda are among those hoping for the right to work legally in America without being deported. The Obama Administration's Dream Act, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, could expand the rights of more than 1 million young illegal immigrants. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull)

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