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250,000 Unlicensed Illinois Drivers Pose Preventable Danger; Increased Insurance Costs for All Drivers

CHICAGO- November 20, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn and Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago) today were joined by state and local leaders and the Illinois Highway Safety Coalition (HSC) to announce their support of efforts to ensure that every Illinois motorist is properly licensed to drive. Because they do not have a driver's license, an estimated 250,000 immigrant motorists are on Illinois roads today that have not passed a driving test. By removing this barrier through responsible legislation, to be introduced by President Cullerton in the coming weeks, Illinois roads will be safer and more immigrants will be able to become stronger contributors to the economy.

"This is a safety issue that impacts every driver in Illinois and we should join together to take swift action to save lives," Governor Quinn said. "Making sure all motorists, regardless of their background, are licensed and insured will drive economic growth and ease the financial burden on all Illinois motorists."

"I'm honored to work with the Illinois Highway Safety Coalition to introduce legislation to improve the safety of our roads and highways by ensuring all Illinois drivers are trained, tested, licensed and insured," said President Cullerton.

According to the Illinois Highway Safety Coalition, unlicensed, uninsured drivers are involved in almost 80,000 accidents in Illinois each year, resulting in $660 million in damage. Unlicensed immigrant drivers cost $64 million in damage claims alone. Unlicensed drivers pose an enormous, yet preventable, safety risk for all Illinois drivers and leads to higher insurance costs for everyone. If half of the estimated 250,000 unlicensed immigrants became properly licensed and insured, Illinois insurance policy holders would save an estimated $46 million a year in premium payments. Nationwide, unlicensed motorists are five times likelier to be involved in a fatal crash than licensed drivers.

Immigrants without a social security number are currently prohibited under state law from getting a driver's license. Studies have shown that immigrants who can drive legally are more likely to work, spend and contribute to the economy. Having a driver's license provides greater access to job opportunities and drives business activity and growth.

"I strongly support state legislation that will allow every Chicagoan, regardless of legal status, to enjoy the rights and responsibilities that come with a driver's license," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "I commend Senate President John Cullerton for his leadership to introduce legislation during the 2012 veto session to require all Illinois drivers, including undocumented drivers, to get trained, licensed and insured. I will be a strong advocate for this bill as we work to make Chicago the most immigrant-friendly city in the country."

In addition to posing a safety risk and a barrier to economic growth, unlicensed immigrant drivers significantly drain local law enforcement resources. In Cook County, nearly 48,000 tickets were issued in 2011 for driving without a license. Unlicensed drivers are also difficult to identify by law enforcement during traffic stops and by first responders and health care providers, which increases the potential for errors.

Washington and New Mexico have already passed similar laws, which resulted in declines in traffic accidents involving unlicensed drivers. By licensing more drivers, Illinois can increase safety across the state and ensure more motorists follow the rules of the road.

For more information about the Highway Safety Coalition and to see the list of lawmakers, business, faith, labor and community groups who support this common sense measure, visit HighwaySafetyCoalition.org
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