



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Senator Helming: It's Time to Stop Yielding to Lawbreakers

SENATOR PAM HELMING June 10, 2019

GENEVA – Senator Pam Helming recently joined county clerks and law enforcement officials in opposition to plans to force local county clerks to issue state driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. The legislation would permit illegal immigrants to apply for standard driver's licenses using foreign identification, leaving county clerks and employees at local Departments of Motor Vehicles unable to verify authenticity. This legislation is currently making its way through the Democrat-controlled Senate and Assembly.

“This proposal is yet another example of politics trampling common sense. We have a duty and obligation to uphold and consistently enforce our laws. We are a proud nation built by immigrants, like my grandfather, who came here legally with his family in search of a better life. We welcome individuals from all countries and all walks of life because it makes America a better and richer nation. However, there is a process in place for entering this country legally. There is no question our federal government has a lot of work to do on improving immigration policy. In the meantime, rewarding those who are breaking the law by living in this country illegally with New York State driver's licenses is wrong. Furthermore, not requiring illegal immigrants to provide the same information our citizens must consent to provide is both unfair and unjust. If this bill becomes law, it will further disincentivize efforts toward naturalization. If you can be here illegally and still receive a driver's license, free college tuition, free legal assistance, and free health care, why would you ever want that

to change?

“Passing this legislation will not make our communities any safer, and it will potentially open the door for illegal immigrants to vote in our elections. Like many states, New York uses our Departments of Motor Vehicles to enroll voters. However, unlike 35 other states across our nation, New York does not have any voter identification laws. As a member of a military family, this is especially concerning to me. Brave men and women have died to protect our rights as citizens and defend our democracy. We should respect that sacrifice and uphold the rule of law, not reward those who have chosen to break the laws of our nation. I applaud our local county clerks and law enforcement leaders for their courage in opposing this bill and their efforts to raise awareness of the very real consequences this would have for our local community and state,” Senator Helming said.

Cayuga County Clerk Sue Dwyer said, “As the Cayuga County Clerk, I oversee the DMV Office in Auburn. Every day, my staff and I, due to state laws, require U.S. citizens to provide several forms of identification before they can process transactions in our office. Sometimes they have to make several trips to our office in order to meet the strict requirements. It is absolutely mind-boggling that the Democrat-controlled Senate and Assembly want to pass legislation that would allow people, who are in our country illegally, to walk up to a DMV counter to apply for a New York State driver’s license by giving DMV staff as little as a foreign document. First of all, we have no way of knowing its authenticity, and if we suspect that it’s a fraudulent document, we will not be allowed to question it. We turn away U.S. citizens if they can’t provide all of their identification documents, yet under this legislation, my DMV staff would be forbidden to turn away illegal individuals. This is a slap in the face to every law-abiding person in our country. This will absolutely not make our country safer. We need a commonsense solution to the immigration issue, but this legislation is anything but commonsense.”

Seneca County Clerk Christina Lotz said, “If the laws for our citizens require birth certificates and social security cards to obtain driver’s licenses, then it should be the same for everyone. You can’t have special rules for a certain group of individuals. We have many that come into our office and have lost their social security card but can tell us the number, and they get very angry when they are told that we can’t help them. But the next person in line is an undocumented immigrant, and we can issue a license for them? Seneca County will not be issuing licenses to undocumented immigrants.”

Wayne County Clerk Mike Jankowski said, “It is my opinion that the proposed bill, which allows for the issuance of driver’s licenses for illegal aliens, would, if passed into law, create a risk to public safety and national security for the citizens of New York State.”

Cayuga County Sheriff Brian Schenck said, “I am very concerned about the ability of our local DMVs to verify and validate identification used by undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses should this legislation pass. We cannot afford to create a path for terrorists and criminals that wish to cause us harm to obtain driver’s licenses and fake identities using false documents.”

Wayne County Sheriff Barry Virts said, “The bill pits local law enforcement against federal authorities with the prohibited sharing of information. I worry about local law enforcement through legitimate law enforcement public safety concerns and investigatory processes getting caught up with the sharing of information.”

Cayuga County District Attorney Jon Budelmann said, “Like Senator Helming, I am the descendant of immigrants and honor their tremendous contributions to this nation. But this legislation ignores another key American principle – that our laws should apply equally to everybody. This law will require county clerks to issue New York State driver’s licenses based on unverified, foreign documents, which may be false or forged. At a time when we are

combatting terrorism worldwide, this legislation would provide official governmental identification to 150,000 undocumented non-citizens (250,000 expected in the first three years) without any verifiable form of identification. The lack of verification of these identities is very alarming. On the other hand, the fact that the standard (to verify identity) for those here legally is higher greatly concerns me. In order to obtain a New York driver's license, a New York citizen is required to provide multiple forms of proof: birth certificate, original Social Security card, and proof of residency (bills, etc.). Quite simply, this legislation would give more rights to undocumented non-citizens than U.S. citizens. Further, according to a recent Siena poll, 61 percent of voters oppose the measure and only 34 percent support it. So, I question, what is the compelling purpose behind passage of this legislation? I am far more concerned about the serious public safety issues with having undocumented people here than whether or not they possess a New York State driver's license. The fact that this bill's proponents do not want those charged with enforcing federal immigration law to access the information and it prohibits state officials from looking into their true identities and contains no plan to get these individuals to apply for legal authority to be in this country concerns me from a public safety standpoint. (This law would prohibit state officials from investigating the true identity of undocumented foreign applicants and also bar federal authorities from accessing the information.) With automatic enrollment to vote with a driver's license application and without voter identification laws in New York State, this legislation would also allow for enrollment of noncitizens to vote in our elections (again, without any verification as to actual name or a way to avoid duplicates). So, not only are these individuals not paying taxes to support the government and infrastructure, but some members of the Legislature want to give them more rights than our own citizens. There is no country in the world that does (or should) allow people who are not citizens of that country to vote in their elections or govern their country. This is simply an unprecedented notion. I urge our legislators to support public safety and equal treatment under the laws, and vote

no.”

“Many clerks across the state have raised serious concerns about this proposal. Instead of taking their concerns seriously and listening to them, members of the Senate Majority have attempted to silence them by introducing additional legislation (S5527). This extreme legislation would empower Governor Cuomo to remove any clerk from office who refuses to issue licenses to illegal immigrants. New York is not a dictatorship. The threat of removing duly elected officials for performing their duties is a radical position. This is nothing more than a bold attempt to intimidate our clerks. As State Senator, I am proud to stand with clerks and law enforcement to send a loud and clear message that we need to keep our nation secure and uphold the rule of law,” Senator Pam Helming said.