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**Drivers License Issue Gets Attention**

**Lawmakers, advocates debate whether illegal aliens should be eligible**

**By Paul Chesser**

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RALEIGH -- The terrorists who attacked Americans in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, killed Peter Gadiel's 23-year-old son James, among thousands of others. Since then Gadiel has waged a campaign to correct flaws in the nation's immigration laws, and in many states' driver license laws.

Gadiel has visited Maryland, Tennessee, and Virginia to tell lawmakers about the need for more stringent documentation for the issuance of driver licenses. Gadiel also testified April 24 before the North Carolina Senate Judiciary Committee. He told the committee that the terrorists on Sept. 11 boarded the hijacked airplanes using easily obtained Virginia and Florida licenses as identification. He said their licenses just as easily could have been obtained in North Carolina.

"[Families of 9/11 victims] know the essential role the driver license played in the death of our loved ones," Gadiel said at a press conference after the committee meeting. "That was their valid ID to get on board (the planes)."

He came to North Carolina to support legislation that sponsors say would tighten lax requirements to obtain a driver license.

"Basically what we're trying to do is get the state to quit handing out real, government-issued identification without any idea of who they're giving it to," said Sen. Fern Shubert, R-Union, who sponsored the bill.

Rep. Jeff Barnhart, R-Cabarrus, has sponsored a House version of the bill, which was voted favorably out of a judiciary committee and awaits consideration by the Rules Committee.

Two years ago the state received national media attention because thousands of illegal immigrants traveled from other states to North Carolina to get driver licenses. The state required little documentation from applicants, and clerks at Division of Motor Vehicle offices asked no

questions about dubious papers that were presented to them.

Lawmakers subsequently mandated that DMV officials require Social Security numbers or IRS taxpayer identification numbers in order for applicants to be issued licenses.

However, Shubert and Barnhart say the state's licensing laws still have gaping holes. Illegal immigrants can easily obtain taxpayer ID numbers from the IRS. Also, to prove residency the state allows immigrants to use documents from foreign governments, preprinted business letterhead, or "any other document deemed reliable by the [DMV]."

"But my all-time favorite for the lazy terrorist who doesn't plan ahead," Shubert said, "the DMV will run off an affidavit for those who have no proof of residence. They sign it and the affidavit becomes the proof."

"That's why people come in by the busload to get their licenses, because we give them away more easily than anyone else," she said.

Shubert's legislation would close the loopholes by requiring the DMV to verify that applicants' Social Security numbers are valid. The bill would also allow the DMV to accept an alien registration number issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Opponents of the proposed law say it discriminates against Hispanics, and that the roads are safer when drivers have licenses and insurance.

"This is utterly false," Gadiel said, unable to hide his anger. Illegal immigrants who get licenses under false pretenses are "lawbreakers from start to finish," he said.

*Chesser is an associate editor at Carolina Journal.*