

Per our conversation, I've pasted the article that featured Elza McGowan into this e-mail. I've also included recent articles I've written on the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration's licensing practices. Please keep me updated on your group's efforts to combat illegal alien licensing in Maryland, Virginia and D.C. Thanks, Keyonna

Driver's license lawsuit sparks terrorism debate
By **Keyonna** Summers, THE WASHINGTON TIMES
Nov 26, 2005

A group dedicated to preventing another September 11 terrorist attack said a recent discrimination lawsuit against Maryland's Motor Vehicle Administration would widen the gaps in licensing standards, making it more likely to provide terrorists with identification.

"What people need to realize is that there are terrorist-exploited loopholes in our system," said Elza Chapa-McGowan, a member of 9/11 Families for a Secure America who is Hispanic. "I think most Americans would say this is unacceptable and we need to start tightening our security."

The immigrant advocacy-group CASA of Maryland filed the suit last week on behalf of 13 immigrants who say the agency's routine rejection of proper documentation and lack of Spanish-language materials and interpreters make it difficult for them to obtain licenses.

The suit has reignited the larger debate between advocacy groups who say barring immigrants from licenses puts uninsured drivers on roads and lobbyists who say issuing driver's licenses to illegal aliens may draw more of them and potential terrorists to Maryland.

CASA legal director Steve Smitson said issuing licenses to immigrants improves national security because it requires them to register with the government.

Licensing also creates a database that police can use to match the addresses and identities of immigrant and alien criminals and victims, he said.

Josh Bernstein, senior policy analyst at the National Immigration Law Center, said barring immigrants from licenses, identification cards and other documents makes the papers valuable on the black market, which is exploited by terrorists.

"When you force people to create a black market, that is the worst thing you can do to combat terrorism," he said.

The 19 September 11 hijackers obtained at least 13 driver's licenses and 21 identification cards from various states, including Virginia, the group said.

Maryland, which does not require legal presence for license applicants, was among six states with the most lax licensing standards, according to a report last year by the Coalition for a Secure Driver's License, another post-September 11 group.

Virginia and the District, which verify the legal presence, visa expiration date and Social Security number of a license applicant, ranked in the highest category.

Several Maryland lawmakers have unsuccessfully proposed legislation that would bar the state's estimated 300,000 illegals from driver's licenses and day-labor centers.

The 9/11 Families group earlier this year lobbied Congress to pass the Real ID Act, which creates a national standard for driver's licenses so all states would have to prove legal presence before issuing a license. It takes effect in 2008.

Still, Mrs. Chapa-McGowan, a Laurel resident whose mother died in the September 11 Pentagon attack, worries that a win by CASA would send the wrong message to terrorists.

"It would hurt Maryland's reputation," she said. "You don't want to be soft on terrorism."

Illegals, immigrants line up for licenses : MVA swamped with walk-ins

By **Keyonna** Summers, THE WASHINGTON TIMES
May 12, 2006

Luz Maria Sanchez is wide awake at 6 a.m. at the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), having arrived at midnight to be first in a line of about 50 immigrants and illegal aliens waiting for the Beltsville branch to open.

"I'm tired. I haven't slept," said Miss Sanchez, a 34-year-old Salvadoran immigrant living in Hyattsville. "But [if I want a driver's license] I have to wait."

Overnight lines outside several MVA branches have evolved since the agency last month stopped taking appointments for immigrants to get driver's licenses and began a walk-in process.

Maryland license applicants do not have to be U.S. citizens, needing only to produce a variety of documents to prove state residency as well as attend a three-hour drug and alcohol course.

Immigrants and illegal aliens arrive at the MVA as early as 11 p.m., napping in cars in hopes of seeing an agent when the office opens at 7 a.m. - an hour and a half before doors open to the general public. When the walk-in process began, some said they returned up to five nights - skipping school or work - because agents could not see the hundreds waiting for a limited number of spots.

"It feels like .. discrimination because we are the only people who have to do this," said William Medina, a Salvadoran immigrant on a tourist visa who lives in Oxon Hill "I think it's something to make you quit, to make you say you don't want to do this anymore. But they are wrong. I will be here every day because I want to do things the right way and follow the law."

But MVA officials say each person in line is guaranteed a chance to go through the agency's pre-screening process, which weeds out applicants who have insufficient or incorrect documents.

"With our current walk-in procedure, twice as many people are actually getting processed than when we were doing the appointments," said MVA spokesman Buel Young.

Nearly two years ago, the agency began scheduling appointments for out-of-country applicants because the lengthy document verification process snarled regular lines. They began the walk-in process on April 17 because a 40 percent no-show rate and documentation problems rendered appointments ineffective, Mr. Young said.

Mr. Young acknowledged reports of as many as 200 people last month, and up to 100 last week, waiting outside some branches. Applicants would tussle in line when some tried to jump ahead, and MVA employees said some would urinate outside their cars during the long wait for the doors to open.

However, the number of cars lining the Beltsville MVA entrance this week was considerably fewer than the dozens that typically wrap around the corner and block traffic, an employee said. The immigrants have created their own waiting list, not recognized by the state, and quietly lined up as the MVA gates opened.

About half of the applicants are barred during pre-screenings because they have the wrong documents, Mr. Young said. "They're instructed [during pre-screenings] on what they need and advised if they have to come back with the information," he said.

Kim Propeack, a spokeswoman for the immigrant advocacy group CASA of Maryland, said the new process has improved backlogs, but there is still a gap in the quality of services for U.S.- and foreign-born license applicants, noting "the MVA isn't even explaining to people what they need, so they're making multiple trips to provide the four or five documents that they need."

That process puts immigrants' lives in danger, she said, indicating a lack of control at the sites. "At the Glen Burnie site, people wait across an eight-lane highway and have to make a mad dash across it," she said.

Last year, CASA sued the MVA, saying among other things its appointment process was discriminatory because it separates foreign-born applicants from the general public. The case is pending in Baltimore City Circuit Court.

While Maryland's Democrat-controlled legislature has killed any changes for illegal aliens to acquire a driver's license, Virginia tightened restrictions after it was learned that some September 11 hijackers had obtained state IDs.

More aliens seek driver's licenses in Maryland

By **Keyonna** Summers, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

May 23, 2006

Since March, the average weekly number of driver's license applications by immigrants and illegal aliens has nearly doubled in Maryland, where legal residency is not required of applicants, according to the state Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA).

The number of out-of-country license applications, or those for noncitizens, has surged from an average of 946 a week to 1,800 a week since March, MVA spokesman Buel Young said.

MVA officials initially attributed the increase to multiple appointment bookings by foreign-born applicants, Mr. Young said. But the average number of out-of-country applications remained high even after the MVA last month stopped taking appointments and began processing twice as many applications through a walk-in process, he said.

"I don't really have an answer" for the increase, Mr. Young said.

Virginia does not issue driver's licenses to illegal aliens, and the state's Department of Motor Vehicles does not track the number of out-of-country applications it processes.

Local immigrants say illegal aliens are contributing to Maryland's surge in license applications by flocking to the state when their visas expire or by using the Maryland addresses of relatives.

"I heard that it's easier [to get licenses] here because in other states you need documents, but here it's not required," said 16-year-old Marcela, a Salvadoran immigrant who lives in Silver Spring and did not want to give her last name.

Antonio Lopez, a Guatemalan immigrant living in Hyattsville, said it is common for illegals to come to Maryland to apply for a license because a green card or Social Security card isn't required.

Cameroonian immigrant Nelson Manga, 35, who is obtaining his green card, said it depends on what a license will be used for.

"Some people want to use it to identify themselves as permanent residents. That's not right," he said.

Although unlawful application for a license violates state law, there is no way to determine whether an illegal is falsely using the address of a relative, nor is it possible to track whether immigrants whose licenses have expired in other states move to Maryland and obtain a driver's license, Mr. Young said.

Neither of those circumstances necessarily constitutes unlawful application if the person can prove state residency.

"Our task at the MVA is to determine whether someone is in fact who they say they are, so we require proof of age, identity and Maryland residency," Mr. Young said.

"If someone provides proper documentation such as bills or lease agreements establishing residency, we must accept it," the MVA spokesman said. "Because proof of legal presence is not required in Maryland, we do not ask if you're here legally or not."

The Coalition for a Secure Driver's License lists Maryland as one of eight states that do not require legal presence to get a license, and the Democrat-controlled Maryland General Assembly has three times rejected bills that would require it.

Last year, Congress passed the Real ID Act, which requires all motor-vehicle agencies in the country by May 2008 to verify applicants' legal presence before issuing them licenses. Licenses from states that do not adopt the new national standards may not be allowed as identification to board planes or to enter federal buildings.

Overnight lines have formed outside several MVA branches since the agency began the walk-in application process nearly two months ago.

Kim Propeack, a spokeswoman for immigrant advocacy group CASA of Maryland, said the out-of-country application increase is more likely because MVA agents often dispense inaccurate information about what documents are required for licenses. Foreign-born applicants thus have to make several trips to provide the correct documentation, she said.

A suit filed last year by CASA against the MVA claims the agency, among other things, makes it more difficult for immigrants to obtain driver's licenses.

"The MVA has for a long time been known for putting up extensive barriers for anyone not born in the United States," Miss Propeack said. "Instead of looking at the totality of what people are submitting and telling them what to do, they're doing it piecemeal, pointing out another problem each time people come back."

Lenny Campello, a Cuban immigrant, said illegals shouldn't be able to get licenses at all.

But Miss Propeack said illegals will continue to drive without licenses.

"Every single state experiences a fair amount of people coming in and trying to get licenses from other states," she said. "It's not special about Maryland, and it's not special about immigrants."

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