

Testimony of Fr. David Blanchfield

Good evening, my name is Fr. David Blanchfield, the pastor of St. Jerome Roman Catholic Church in Norwalk, CT. I am also a leader in CONECT – Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut. Why you might ask would a pastor of a suburban Catholic Church with just a sprinkling of Latino parishioners be concerned with getting driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants?

My reasons are all rooted in my 30 years of priesthood. Recently two of the young men in my parish became police officers, one here in New Haven. When late at night they have to make a traffic stop, I want them to know who it is they are stopping. Granting driver's licenses to 54,000 undocumented immigrants in CT will greatly reduce their anxiety as they know who it is being stopped, as well as his or her driving record. In addition they will waste less time and paperwork and our court system will not get bogged down in driver's license infractions.

I have also had parishioners who were in car accidents with drivers with neither licenses nor insurance. Passing a law to allow undocumented drivers, who have solid proof of identification and a history of residency, will result in safer drivers because they will have passed driving tests and know our laws. I will also be happy to see the cost to insure my car come down as more drivers get insurance.

Like many of you I too am concerned about the financial health of the state. Our budget problems reduce programs for those in real need. Passing this law will bring in more revenue -- who can be against that!

Finally, we live in a country that values family life. My own paternal grandparents were Irish immigrants. When they came here you did not need a visa; you could just show up. In the 1920's we started requiring visas. Today, if you're coming from Mexico to join a sibling, the wait to get a visa is 16 years. If today's laws had been in effect back in the early 20th century my grandparents, and I suspect many of yours, could never have come here legally.

My grandparents came for the sake of family. The undocumented today are here for the same reason, to feed their families, to get ahead, to live the American Dream. To be an undocumented immigrant is not a criminal offense. Without

driver's licenses, which they need to get work, these hard workers are being deported and families broken up without need.

To pass this law is a win for everyone in the State of Connecticut. It makes our roads safer, it makes for a better state economy, and it helps keep good hard working families together. I urge you to support this bill.