

Senate Transportation Committee

Vivian Hall 271-3091

HB 452-FN, relative to the issuance of drivers' licenses for aliens temporarily residing in New Hampshire.

Hearing Date: April 8, 2025

Time Opened: 3:13 p.m.

Time Closed: 4:45 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ricciardi, McConkey, Ward, Fenton and Prentiss

Bill Analysis: This bill further delineates requirements regarding issuance and renewal of nonresident alien drivers' licenses.

Sponsors:

Rep. T. Walsh

Rep. Hill

Rep. Osborne

Rep. Sweeney

Rep. Cambrils

Rep. Gagne

Rep. Packard

Rep. S. Smith

Rep. Gorski

Rep. Roy

Sen. Abbas

Sen. Murphy

Who supports the bill: 22 individuals signed in support of HB 452-FN. Contact vivian.hall@gc.nh.gov for further details

Who opposes the bill: 618 individuals signed in opposition of HB 452-FN. Contact vivian.hall@gc.nh.gov for further details

Who is neutral on the bill: 2 individuals signed in as neutral for HB 452-FN. Contact vivian.hall@gc.nh.gov for further details

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Walsh

- Rep. Walsh stated this year's bill is identical to last year's version, with changes focused solely on eligibility criteria and procedural clarifications, particularly removing references related to the country of origin due to differing processes.
- Part two of the bill addresses cleanup of existing statutes, primarily concerning driver's license provisions for non-residents; the notable change is in line 15, where "may" should be revised to "shall" to reflect directive authority.

- This legislation responds to concerns about individuals claiming asylum being granted lawful presence and access to driver's licenses prior to full legal status determination.
- The bill aims to close loopholes that allow temporary work permit holders to obtain licenses before establishing verified lawful presence, citing data on high rates of illegitimate claims.
- Sen. Ricciardi questioned what the intent of the bill was. She emphasized that a person cannot vote without proof of U.S citizenship and asked if he agreed that this has been addressed under the current law.
- Rep. Walsh answered there is repeated language in New Hampshire statutes. He is willing to remove any language that is redundant in his bill.
- Sen. Ricciardi expressed that she received many emails in opposition to this bill.
- Rep. Walsh remarked there needs to be special indication on the ID about the individuals' immigration status.
- Sen. Ricciardi asked about the Real ID act and how this is not already addressed. Rep. Walsh stated he disagrees with the Real ID act as he does not find the current policies secure enough.
- Sen. Ricciardi shared her husband's immigration journey and expressed that it is important to have a vehicle to work. She asked what it would have done if he couldn't have his license.
- He argued that it is a different world from when her husband migrated to the United States and said under the Biden administration, we have had the second largest influx of immigrants in U.S history.
- Sen. Ricciardi asked why those living here on a temporary basis for work cannot obtain a license. Rep. Walsh clarified this bill focuses solely on asylum seekers.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Leslie Zimmer

- Ms. Zimmer stated most asylum seekers follow the rules and attend their hearings, even when facing deportation.
- She explained immigrants make up 7% of New Hampshire's population and 8% of its workforce, filling essential job gaps.
- Ms. Zimmer emphasized there are only 28 available workers for every 100 job openings in New Hampshire.
- She conveyed that immigrant households contribute significantly to local taxes (1 in 6 tax dollars in 2022).
- With 20 immigration judges recently terminated, Ms. Zimmer expressed concern over the long waiting times for a court date.

Lisa Beaudoin, Executive Director, New Hampshire Council of Churches

- Director Beaudoin stated this bill would prevent the Division of Motor Vehicles from issuing driver's licenses to individuals without permanent citizenship, including asylum seekers, limiting their ability to work, attend school, or access healthcare.
- She said this bill would replace a balanced, discretionary system with a rigid approach that promotes hardship, risk, and profiling, without solving any known issue.
- Director Beaudoin explained that asylum seekers and others with temporary legal status undergo thorough vetting and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Stacy Brown, City Councilor, Concord, Ward 5

- Councilor Brown shared a story about an immigrant she knows that changed her views on immigration policy.
- She explained the economic benefits of having immigrant workers in New Hampshire.
- She emphasized the need to keep policies fair and balanced.
- Sen. Ward asked, "There are legal immigrants who have green cards or have visas who work in New Hampshire, what about people who have come here illegally?"
- Councilor Brown replied she did not know anyone who had come here illegally.
- Sen. Ward asked her how one would know if someone was here legally if they did not have the verification to prove it. Councilor Brown reassured her that the people she is talking about have gone through all necessary steps to be here legally.
- Sen. Ricciardi remarked that the proposed bill says that if a person has a work permit, they cannot have a driver's license. Councilor Brown agreed the proposed bill would penalize contributors.

Kathryn Burnett

- Ms. Burnett expressed confusion over the bill, questioning its intent and how it defines asylum seekers, noting it could negatively impact individuals with temporary protected status, humanitarian parole, and refugees.
- She criticized the bill for being overly broad and unclear.

Benjamin Reynolds

- Mr. Reynolds is an immigrant from New Zealand that immigrated here upon marrying his wife, who is a U.S citizen.
- He emphasized that he pays his taxes and contributes to the local economy without the right to vote.
- Mr. Reynolds is waiting for his Green Card and must renew his license every year in the meantime.
- He expressed concern regarding the ability to renew his license while going through the process to become a permanent U.S citizen.

Representative Mary Georges

- Rep. Georges opposes this bill.
- She explained the various circumstances that would bring immigrants to the U.S and the process to get a Green Card.
- She was an immigrant for 10 years before becoming naturalized and was required to renew her driver's license every year.
- She expressed the struggles immigrants will face who are here legally if they are unable to renew their license.

Christine Kindecke

- Ms. Kindecke expressed concern over the intent of the bill.

Steve Schuch

- Mr. Schuch shared a personal story about an immigrant family who needed asylum from the Mexican Cartel.
- He expressed concern over the struggles this family would face if this bill were to pass.
- Mr. Schuch explained that a person cannot support their family if they are unable to drive in New Hampshire.

David Blair

- Mr. Blair shared a story of an immigrant he knows who works hard to be here in New Hampshire.
- He expressed that this individual contributes taxes to the local economy.
- Mr. Blair spoke to the i-589 form process for asylees.

Jessica Pelletier, Ascentria Care Alliance:

- Ms. Pelletier outlined the process to be granted asylum in the United States.

- She also noted that this bill conflicts with current federal law.
- Sen. Ricciardi clarified that this bill focuses on illegal immigrants and noted the bill's wording does not reflect that. Ms. Pelletier agreed.
- Sen. Ricciardi asked if the wrong title of the agency was used in the bill. She confirmed this.
- Senator Ward asked what is involved in a biometric assessment. Ms. Pelletier clarified that a fingerprint scan, eye retina scan, photograph, and signature are included.

Henry Harris

- Mr. Harris questioned the intent of the proposed bill.
- He stated that the current system is working as shown by the people who recertify their legal status every year.
- He also emphasized that the bill's language should be revised to protect legal residents, including students in state-certified LNA programs
- Mr. Harris expressed concern that replacing current support with additional barriers wastes time and burdens individuals, especially given the inadequacy of public transportation.

Steve Silverstein

- Mr. Silverstein has been a manufacturer for 25 years and has employed many individuals with work authorization who are not permanent residents.
- He stated that the inability for these workers to drive severely limits their lives and hampers business operations.
- Sen. McConkey asked what he does for work. He replied that he owns a manufacturing business in Keene called Tree Free Greeting.
- Sen. McConkey asked how many employees Mr. Silverstein has. He stated he has approximately 20.

Peter Rahlson

- Mr. Rahlson has spent the last three years supporting local Afghan refugees.
- He strongly opposes the bill, arguing it lacks empathy and harms community progress.

Doris Hampton

- Ms. Hampton stated that this bill feels deeply personal to her because it affects people she knows, who are here legally after passing rigorous entry requirements.
- She expressed her concern about this bill negatively impacting communities.

Ken Barns

- Mr. Barns emphasized that a driver's license is essential in New Hampshire.

- He stated that there is a lack of adequate public transportation, and basic tasks like grocery shopping or visiting a child's school require a car.
- Mr. Barns explained that asylum seekers are waiting legally and patiently for entry into the U.S.
- He recalled how his Jewish grandfather had to flee Poland to survive, and this is the true meaning of asylum.

Eva Castillo, Director, New Hampshire Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees

- Director Castillo stated this bill is trying to solve a problem that New Hampshire does not have.
- She expressed that this bill denotes a lack of understanding for immigration laws.
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Christine Wellington

- Ms. Wellington noted this bill is confusing as written and uses terms not part of immigration law.
- She stated the Division of Motor Vehicles is already doing a good job vetting non-citizens.

Bruce Burke

- Mr. Burke stated his opposition to the bill.
- He shared his personal experience helping a former Afghan military officer obtain his license.

Richard Minard

- Mr. Minard emphasized that his work with Afghan parolees exposed the flaws in this bill.
- He stated it is absurd to expect someone who fled the Taliban to contact them for a copy of their driver's license from Afghanistan.

Neutral Information Presented:

Director John Marasco and Kathy O'Neill, Division of Motor Vehicles.

- Sen. Ricciardi asked for clarification regarding the words "legal" and "illegal".
- Sen. Fenton asked how the DMV interprets exception for non-resident aliens who are temporarily living in New Hampshire and if more training is needed to decide that.
- Director Marasco explained that it is complex
- Ms. O'Neill explained that the Division of Motor Vehicles uses USCIS to see any changes or documents that may change. She emphasized that communication is

the biggest factor. The Division of Motor Vehicles has a database of people who are ineligible to receive a license and keeps this list up to date.

- Sen. Fenton asked if this bill passed if there would be training. Ms. O'Neill clarified that the Division of Motor Vehicles only issues driver's licenses to people who are here legally.
- Sen. McConkey asked if people who have come across the border and are here on asylum with a pending court date, if they are issued credentials. He followed up with what sort of documentation is needed to receive a license.
- Ms. O'Neill clarified that each status requires different documentation.
- Sen. Prentiss inquired if someone's immigration status changes if they need a new license reflecting their new status and what the cost would be to do this.
- Director Marasco clarified that if the status changes, a person would need to update their license to reflect their new status upon renewal.
- Sen. McConkey asked if someone has a student visa, if the license is issued for the period their student visa reflects. Ms. O'Neill confirmed this.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 14, 2025