Editorial: Immigrant driver's license policy makes sense

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Beginning Jan. 1, immigrants who are here illegally will be able to take another small step out of the shadows by applying for California driver's licenses.

It took years to enact this controversial policy, but ultimately granting licenses to qualified drivers, regardless of their legal status, is the right thing to do. Why? Because, as nine other states and the District of Columbia have figured out, ensuring public safety on the roadways is more important than punishing people for being in the country illegally.

As spelled out in AB 60, which was passed by the state Legislature and signed into law last year, applicants will have to clear reasonable hurdles. They must provide proof of identity (the accepted credentials, such as passports and birth certificates, vary by native country) and proof of California residency. They must then meet the same criteria as everyone else: Pass a written exam on the rules of the road, a vision test and a road test.

At the insistence of the Department of Homeland Security, each license will note that it is "not acceptable for federal purposes" and "does not establish eligibility for employment, voter registration, or public benefits." Nor can the licenses be used to clear security checks at airports.

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