Christian Reformed Church

MEMORANDUM

August 28, 2015

Michigan Law Revision Commission
Boji Tower
124 W. Allegan, 3rd Floor
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Commission Members,

Thank you for your invitation to present comments regarding a Driving Permit for immigrants in Michigan.

The Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church in North America has been a long- time advocate for reform of our federal immigration system. Through educating congregations about immigration and hearing stories from pastors both in our denomination and the wider Evangelical Christian community in Michigan, we have identified the need for driving permits for unauthorized and other immigrants.

The stress of living without a valid driving permit has impacted our church in significant ways.

- **It prevents full participation in the life of faith.** The inability to legally drive has prevented otherwise active church members from attending and volunteering for church programs and events. Kids aren't participating in youth group, moms are missing Bible studies, and families are failing to show up for worship services because they do not have transportation. Pastors have reported that some families who regularly attend worship do not want to risk a public profession of faith, be baptized, or officially join the church because of fear based on their immigration status becoming known if they cannot contribute fully to the life of the church.
- **It impacts the thriving of children – many of whom are US citizens.** Pastors have shared their concerns about children who miss school, youth events, and opportunities for spiritual development because their parents fear the process of transporting them.
- **It presents an ethical dilemma for both immigrants and employers.** Our church members who own agriculture businesses and employ immigrants tell us that they are put in an ethical bind by a broken federal immigration system which forces their employees to lie about their documents, forces employers into a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and forces unintended consequences like unpermitted driving to and from work. Employers struggle with simply turning a blind eye to the reality that driving puts employees in harm's way.
- **It presents a pastoral care challenge for pastors.** Most pastors aren't sure how to counsel members who employ immigrants and face such ethical dilemmas. They don't know how to counsel immigrant members who are knowingly driving – or facing huge quality-of-life challenges if they choose not to drive – without a permit.

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In the Christian Reformed Church, we have several immigrant congregations who could speak of their own experience with this issue. While the majority of our congregations are made up of mostly white, middle-class, conservative-leaning people, they are increasingly learning about the ways our broken immigration system and its consequences (including the lack of legal driving permission in Michigan) are impacting people they have come to know and love.

We are prayerfully and hopefully anticipating the work of this committee, and are grateful for your attention to our perspective.

Respectfully,
Rev. Kate Kooyman
Office of Social Justice, CRCNA