

MARIN ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

An Affiliate of the Bay Area Industrial Areas Foundation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In San Rafael, Immigrants Prepare for New Drivers License Law

On Sunday, November 2, over 330 people gathered in the gymnasium at St Raphael Catholic Church in San Rafael for a workshop on AB60, the new California Drivers License Law, organized by the Marin Organizing Committee (MOC). AB60, which was signed by Governor Brown last year, grants valid California driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants beginning in 2015.

MOC was active in supporting the legislation last year, meeting with the author Assembly Member Alejo early on in the process and securing the support of District 10 Assembly Member Marc Levine, who represents Marin County. The new license will grant undocumented drivers the same driving privileges offered to US citizens and permanent residents, but will have the words "Federal Limits Apply" on the front—the result of a legislative compromise to pacify law enforcement advocates and the Department of Homeland Security, allowing the bill to pass.

AB60 makes more than 2 million immigrants in California eligible for a drivers license, but there are few free and low-cost resources available to families who want to apply or study for the written test. So MOC leaders have taken matters into their own hands, meeting with DMV officials and preparing their own educational materials.

"We're not waiting for the experts to tell us what to do," said Cristina Garcia, a leader with Parent Services Project, "We are becoming the experts."

At Sunday's workshop, leaders from MOC member institutions—including St Raphael Church, Parent Services Project, First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, and others—made a PowerPoint presentation about the new law and the application process, went through sample test questions, and answered questions from the audience.

Many in attendance expressed concern that applying for the license will make them vulnerable to police discrimination or expose them to Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE).

MOC invited a representative from the San Rafael Police Department, Lieutenant Jim Correa, to address these concerns. When asked how immigrants with the new drivers licenses will be treated by police when stopped, Lt. Correa replied, "We are not going to treat them any differently. When you get pulled over and have a driver's license, you will be treated like any other citizen."

MOC leaders also warned people to watch out for fraud perpetrated by those seeking to profit from the confusion surrounding the new license. "Remember, only the DMV can give you a drivers license," said Karla Valdez of Parent Services Project, "It costs \$33. You don't need to pay anyone else for services or assistance with this."

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Over the next several months, MOC institutions will be organizing more workshops like this, as well as study groups for immigrants who want to study for the written and behind-the-wheel tests, the latter of which will only be offered by the DMV in English.

"Of course you already know what the difference between a red light or a green light is," said Rev. Jose Ramos of First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, "However, there are going to be tough questions on the written test. You must learn the logic of the questions, so you can pass the test on the first try."

MOC's work on AB60 is part of a larger effort to increase the standing of immigrants in local politics, an effort which began with MOC's successful work to change San Rafael's car impoundment policy for unlicensed drivers in 2011, and now includes working to establish a community-oriented police substation in the Canal neighborhood.

"After so many fights and struggles, finally undocumented immigrants can have a license in the beautiful state of California," said Inez Benavidez of St Raphael Church, who chaired Sunday's workshop,

"ABC 60 is the fruit of our efforts. When the people unite, we are able to make a difference."

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The Marin Organizing Committee is an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the oldest and largest broad-based organizing and leadership development organization in the country. Bay Area IAF organizations include organizing efforts in Marin, Sonoma, Solano, Napa, Yolo, Contra Costa, San Mateo, San Francisco, and Santa Clara counties. Bay Area IAF is also a member of DriveCA, a coalition of organizations across the state working to ensure the successful implementation of AB60.