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# Most new California licenses go to drivers in country illegally

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More than half of all new California driver's licenses this year have gone to people who are in the country illegally, the state said Friday

The California Department of Motor Vehicles reported it has issued roughly 397,000 licenses to people who live in the country illegally. A total of 759,000 licenses have been issued in the first six months of the year. The DMV only issued 435,000 licenses in the first six months of 2014.

The new law initially generated huge interest causing long lines at motor vehicle offices in January and February. The DMV expects to see about one million more applicants over the next three years who are covered under new law.

"We hope that all of those people will be able to pass the testing and have the necessary documents to obtain" a license, said DMV spokeswoman Jessica Gonzalez.

Supporters of the law say giving licenses to people regardless of their immigration status makes the road safer for everyone. New drivers say having a license means they can travel more freely for work or pleasure.

"It's great that people are taking advantage of this new law," said Jackelin Aguilar, community organizer for Placer People of Faith Together, an Auburn, California-based group that supports the new licenses.

"It's definitely a step forward for the families, and having identification is huge," Aguilar said.

Opponents say people who get into the country illegally shouldn't be rewarded.

Roy Beck, president of NumbersUSA, which advocates for legal and limited immigration, criticized California for making life easier for people in the country illegally, at the expense of citizens and legal residents.

"There are now 400,000 more signals to people all over the world that working illegally in California is encouraged by the government itself," he said.

About 687,000 people have applied for the licenses issued to illegal immigrants. Applicants must pass driving tests and show proof of residency and identity.

The new license is marked differently than those issued to other drivers in the state and is not considered a valid form of federal identification, for example, to board an airplane.

More than 1.1 million people who qualify for the new licenses took the written driver's test between Jan. 2 and June 30, and 436,000 have also taken a behind-the-wheel driving test.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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