

Committee Chair, Senator Reed, and Members of the Senate Local Government Committee:

My name is Scott Parsley, I reside at 103 N. Liberty Ave, Madison SD. I am testifying today in favor of Senate Bill 193: “An act to allow an applicant to have an interpreter present during the written and driving portion of a driver’s test license exam.”

Over the past two years I have been working with five other citizens of Madison to create the “Madison Welcome Corps” to sponsor a refugee family through a program called “Welcome Corps.” This program was under the Immigration and Naturalization Services and Homeland Security. The purpose of the program was to allow a group of local citizens to team up, complete online training, undergo a background check, complete an application and raise funds in order to sponsor a refugee family.

All of the refugees that qualify for this program have been fully vetted and arrive in the US with an open-ended I 94 visa, a social security card, and a US issued identification card. To say this in another way, they are fully eligible to be in the US indefinitely and to work here. One year after their arrival, these individuals are eligible to apply for their Green Cards and begin the path to citizenship.

Madison Welcome Corps was excited and happy to welcome a family from Venezuela consisting of a husband and wife to Madison in September of 2024. Since that time both spouses have found work, which happened almost immediately after their arrival. Madison Welcome Corps had arranged housing for them, so they would have a home upon arrival. As legal immigrants they were eligible for Medicaid upon their arrival which they applied for and received. I am happy to report that because of their income they became ineligible for Medicaid on January first and now have a personal health insurance policy.

Part of the responsibility undertaken by Madison Welcome Corps was to provide resources to pay for their housing and living expenses for at least the first 90 to 120 days following their arrival. Again I am happy to report that the family, because of their employment, has taken over all of their household expenses including their rent. Because of the money they were able to save in their first few months they were also able to buy a car. This was very important as they both work just outside of Madison which requires them to have transportation. To date either someone from the Welcome Corp team has been driving them to and from work or they have paid a fellow worker to give them a ride, which has been hit and miss.

As they have prepared to get their driver's license they have been studying the driver's manual in Spanish, their native language, and have been excited to take their test in Spanish as they are just now beginning to learn English. As they prepared for the test, they found out they could not have an interpreter with them when they are doing the driving portion of the test.

As someone who has been helping this family along the way, this came as quite a shock to me and confusing. My confusion is, if you can study for and take your written test in Spanish, why wouldn't you be able to have an interpreter for the driving portion? While not all states have the provision for interpreters, there are many that make this accommodation for many languages. If I'm not mistaken, our state makes an exception for hearing impaired individuals who wish to get their driver's license.

The current rule for the driving portion of the test is an impediment for foreign speakers who are productive, law abiding immigrants who contribute to the work force of our state.

I am asking the committee to please change the rule and allow for qualified interpreters at the expense of the applicant.