



January 27, 2023

Senator Zaynab Mohamed
2103 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Aisha Gomez
453 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Driver's Licenses for All - Licensias para todos

Dear Senator Mohamed and Representative Gomez:

Cooperativa Mercado Central Inc. was incorporated in 1998 to foster entrepreneurship in the Latine community in Minnesota. The Cooperativa is the sole member of Mercado Central LLC, a Delaware limited liability company that owns and operates Mercado Central, a cultural mall located at 1515 East Lake Street in Minneapolis. Mercado Central is home to thirty-six family-owned businesses and three nonprofits. Cooperative members, tenants, and our management office employ over 75 Minnesotans.

We are thankful for your leadership on behalf of Driver's Licenses for All (H.F. 4/S.F. 27). This legislation is of critical importance to our immigrant communities in Minnesota to travel safely to work, school, doctor visits and family gatherings. Many of our customers, neighbors, suppliers, and fellow business owners along Lake Street, the Twin Cities, and Greater Minnesota face the constant humiliation of not being able to present a driver's license or government-issued identification despite having paid taxes, worked diligently to raise their families, and called Minnesota home for decades.

Undocumented community members contribute to the well-being of our state as essential workers, farm workers, mechanics, construction workers, care givers, and volunteers. According to Fwd.US, undocumented immigrants are one of the largest groups among the immigrant essential workforce, making up 5.2 million essential workers, of which nearly 1 million are Dreamers. Depriving workers of a means to reach their jobs and take care of their families is misguided. It also makes little economic sense. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits Minnesota Budget Project estimates that annual income would increase

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between \$2,000 to \$6,000 for full-time workers lacking immigration status if permitted to obtain a driver's license. That means more spending, boosting Minnesota's economy for all of us.

At Mercado Central our restaurants pride themselves in serving delicious and heart-warming food prepared with fresh ingredients. Our suppliers in Greater Minnesota depend on immigrant farm workers who need safe and legal access to roads in rural areas with little to no existing public transit. Many of our customers are farm workers or factory workers in Greater Minnesota who travel to Lake Street for special occasions, to purchase foods from Latin America not readily available in rural areas, and to experience our festivals and traditional celebrations.

Mercado Central is a place young people love visiting on school trips, family gatherings, to buy t-shirts, soccer uniforms, a traditional souvenir, or to have a meal with friends. As of 2018, 30,700 U.S. citizen children in Minnesota have parents who lack immigration status, 2.4% of all children under 18 in the state. For these mixed-status families, issuing licenses to parents and caregivers means giving U.S. citizen children and undocumented children the certainty of knowing their parents can drive them safely to the places they love to go.

Mercado Central welcomes every person regardless of immigration status. We are hopeful that our state government will allow all our fellow Minnesotans to drive legally regardless of immigration status. We look forward to celebrating passage of Driver's Licenses for All together at Mercado Central in the coming days.

Respectfully Submitted,

Isis Gastelum
President of the Board of Directors
Cooperativa Mercado Central, Inc.

Juan Linares
Project Manager
Mercado Central LLC

cc: Benjamin Pettee
Paul Cummings

