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## Transportation Needs of Latinos in Pittsfield, MA

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# Transportation Needs of Latinos in Pittsfield, MA

Daniela Bravo, Aida Palencia, Chanel Fields, Luis Natal, Francisco Rodriguez, Patricia Guardado, Edna DaCosta, Zaida Ismatul, Melissa Correa, July Suarez, Joseli Alonzo, Andrea Ornelas, Phillip Granberry, and María Idalí Torres

## Summary/ Background

Latinos in Pittsfield are a small but fast growing population. The most significant issue they face is related to transportation.

1. Because the area's lack of population density, Berkshire County Regional Transportation Authority provides limited bus routes.
2. In Massachusetts in 2012, 72% of the population drove to work, while in Berkshire County 86% did. Likewise, in Massachusetts 9% used public transit but in Berkshire County only 2% did (ACS, 2012).
3. Massachusetts has failed to enact a Safe Driving Bill, even though Sen. Patricia Jehlen and Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier have sponsored H. 3285.

## Approaches

As part of an undergraduate student field research course, we developed our exploratory research methodology



Field-Work Observations and Participatory Debriefings



Key Informant & Unstructured Interviews with Community Members



Analysis of students' Field Notes & Secondary Data Analysis from the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS)

## Latino Resident Perspectives

### Based on Student Notes

#### Fear of Deportation:

- Latino immigrant mother describes how in one opportunity her very young daughter and herself witnessed how her husband got pulled over and later arrested for not having a valid driver's license, a very traumatizing experience for a little girl. She says "My little girl is so attached to her dad, for this reason we don't want this incident to happen again but continues to be a problem due to the lack of public transportation" (Pittsfield resident)

#### Need for Increased Public Transportation:

- A young man did not have a reliable form of transportation to get to work-as a consequence, he walks to and from work everyday regardless of weather condition. The walk is roughly 40 minutes.
- Transportation schedule is unreliable. There is about an hour difference between each scheduled bus route and it stops around 7pm.

#### Transportation for Medical Care:

- Residents in isolated areas must rely on Community Health Programs' mobile health services to access needed primary care.
- A Latina resident's husband works in a farm, they live isolated from everything else. She has to pay \$40 for taxi to go to her appointments.

#### Isolation and the Need of Transportation:

- Many undocumented immigrants drive without licenses because they do not have access to frequent public transportation. This limits their interactions with surrounding neighborhoods.
- The priest from Saint Mark's Church goes to Great Barrington to celebrate Mass due to transportation issues and isolation.

## References

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## Implications for Policy

Transportation has an impact on deportation rates, accessibility to work, resident's healthcare access, and isolation.

#### The Safe Driving Bill (H. 3285):

Any MA resident who is ineligible for a Social Security Number will have the ability to obtain a driver's license for a period of four years. A driver will be required to provide proof of insurance upon request from a police officer. The individual requesting this license will not be eligible for any public benefits (The Commonwealth of Massachusetts).

#### States that Have Passed the Bill:

Eleven states including Vermont and Connecticut have passed laws to issue driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants (Bienbaum, 2014).

#### Berkshire County Regional Transportation Authority:

Because of lack of funding, underdeveloped public transportation affects many residents. Funding is needed to improve these services in Pittsfield.

#### Benefits of Passing H.3285 and Improving Transportation Services:

According to State Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, "All the people who were born here and all the people who have come here will be safer if this bill is passed, because the roads are safer when all drivers are trained, are licensed and are insured" (Worcester Telegram & Gazette)

Passing the Safe Driving Bill could:

1. Increase mobility and decrease isolation
2. Decrease the number of uninsured drivers
3. Decrease cost of insurance premiums
4. Reduce the risk of deportations
5. Allow residents to travel to work easier
6. Improve drivers' safety and reduce hit-and-run rates
7. Have a positive effect on residents' medical compliance



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