



Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 709:

Vehicle Laws - Canceled, Revoked, and Suspended Driver's Licenses - Penalties

TO: Hon. William C. Smith, Chair, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

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The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support Senate Bill 709 as a means to repeal the term of imprisonment and reduce the points assessed for a person convicted of possessing any canceled, revoked, or suspended license.

A 'Driving While Suspended' conviction in Maryland for an individual whose license has been suspended for failing to pay a ticket is subject to a 60-day jail term and a \$500 fine. The policy of driver's license suspension for failure to pay traffic fines has disproportionate and highly negative impacts on the poor. It is a policy that further impoverishes poor people who face income and job loss as a result of their inability to drive to work and can lead to criminal charges simply due to the inability to pay a traffic fine.

Mobility is essential for employment, as the majority of Maryland workers must drive to reach their jobs. In this regional economy, nearly 50 percent of Marylanders travel outside of their county for employment. This makes access to a driver's license essential to the livelihood of nearly half of Maryland's working population. Additionally, many of the jobs available to low-wage workers require a valid driver's license for employment. As such, Maryland's low-wage workers, oftentimes, must weigh the risks of driving without a license against the need to earn income.

At JOTF, we routinely encounter those who are directly impacted by Maryland's use of driver's license suspension and revocation as a debt collection practice. We encounter it through the stories of our Project JumpStart participants or from the millions of low-wage workers who we advocate for in Annapolis. In every instance, the case is the same – a debt is owed, there is no ability to pay, a driver's license is revoked or suspended – creating a cycle of lost employment, income, and even your freedom. Communities of color are impacted the most, due to over-policing and motor vehicles law steeped in racial profiling.

On this issue, it is best to compare the state to states that have adequately monitored and documented this issue. In New Jersey, the Motor Vehicles Affordability and Fairness Task Force, which was created by statute, studied the negative impact of the revocation or suspension of licenses for "social

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non-conformance” offenses, like unpaid parking tickets. The study showed that 42% of New Jersey drivers lost their jobs after their license was revoked. Of those drivers, 45% of them were unable to regain employment, and of those that did, 88% reported a decrease in income. The correlation is clear and the adverse effects are damaging for low-income workers and their families.

Senate Bill 709 is essential to moving the state away from punitively punishing the poor for their volatile economic state. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report of Senate Bill 709.

American Community Survey. 2010-2015 estimates for Maryland. Economic characteristics data profile.

<https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/2015/>

“Drivers License Suspensions Create A Cycle of Debt,” April 4, 2015, New York Times,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/us/with-drivers-license-suspensions-a-cycle-of-debt.htm>

“Vehicle Asset Limits and License Suspensions, Disproportionate Impact on Low-Income Communities and Communities of Color,” CLASP, October 2016,

<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/vehicle-asset-limit-brief-final-draft.pdf>