



Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF SENATE BILL 373

Vehicle Laws - Suspension of Driver's License or Registration - Unpaid Citations or Judgments

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

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 10, 2021

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for better jobs, skills training, and wages for low-income workers and job seekers in Maryland. We strongly oppose Senate Bill 373 as a means to ensure that we are not further pushing the poor into poverty via driver's license suspension and punitive civil judgement enforcement due to their inability to pay insurance debts.

Mobility is key in Maryland's regional economy. The employment opportunities for individuals with a suspended driver's license are nearly nonexistent, especially for low-wage workers. Most of the jobs they are eligible to even apply for require a valid driver's license including construction, plumbing, sales, and CDL positions. Additionally, the lack of a regional public transit system places most residents at the mercy of mobility – the key to mobility being a valid driver's license. In fact, only 9% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one hour, one-way by public transit. Almost half of working Marylanders travel to another county to work, yet many are already choosing between income and safety, or even further, income and criminal penalties because their driver's license is suspended.

Current Maryland law allows private auto insurers to utilize non-driving related factors including credit scores, education level, occupation, and zip code to set insurance premiums. The use of these factors results in disproportionately high premiums for low-income workers of color who simply can't afford it. A study conducted in Maryland found that holding all other factors constant, drivers living in urban neighborhoods pay 60% to 100% more than drivers living in nearby suburbs. This effect is most pronounced in communities of color.

Beyond this, Maryland Code Ann., Transportation §16–303 and §17–707 state that driving on an invalid license (suspended, canceled, or revoked) or without auto insurance in Maryland is a crime punishable by up to (1) one year in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both. As such, this bill will needlessly criminalize poverty by mandating that if lower-income individuals do not immediately pay inflated auto insurance rates, then a suspended driver's license and registration, arrest, and/or incarceration await them. Further complicating the ability of low-wage workers to secure and maintain employment.

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

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Across the country, national nonpartisan research has guided states away from using this highly punitive measure to ensure debt collection. This practice not only deprives residents of their ability to access jobs and maintain their employment, but it ultimately costs more than is collected due to the resources used to ensure driver's licenses are suspended.

Employment barriers for low-wage workers are seemingly insurmountable. They need access to affordable higher education, consistent employment, and reliable transportation in order to meet life's demands- not the complete destruction of personal opportunities debts that they are already too poor to pay. JOTF opposes efforts to deepen barriers to employment for Marylanders struggling with volatile incomes. For these reasons, we respectfully urge an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 373.