



**Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB 373 -- Vehicle Laws – Suspension of Driver’s License or Vehicle Registration–
Unpaid Judgments
Position: Unfavorable**

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Will Smith
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members,

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a non-profit group that works with consumer-friendly auto dealers and consumer advocates to foster safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers, car buyers and dealers.

We oppose **SB 373** because it is unfairly (and perhaps counter-productively) punitive toward drivers who may be unable to quickly fulfill a judgment against them for damages caused on Maryland's roads – or who may miss even a single payment of an installment plan meant to satisfy such a judgment. Indeed, the additional sanctions it mandates will tend, in many cases, not only to make it more difficult for drivers facing judgments to meet those judgments – and their other debts and obligations – but to push them into further legal difficulties.

The bill enables insurers who represent creditors to move quickly to suspend both the driver's license and vehicle registration(s) of a driver who hasn't been able to pay the judgment, if a judgment is unmet just 30 days after it is handed down – based only on the judgment itself and a "certificate of facts" from the insurer itself. While it does allow the court to reinstate the debtor's license and registration if an installment plan to meet the debt has been established, the bill also enables the insurer to renew suspension of the driver's license and registration if a single payment is missed or if the debtor violates any term of the repayment agreement.

Yet because being able to drive is frequently critical to a Marylander's ability to make a living, losing the right to drive (legally) will in many cases significantly impede the debtor's ability to earn enough to repay the debt – and to meet his or her many other needs. At the same time, we know that all too often drivers with suspended licenses and registrations continue to drive illegally – sometimes because they feel they need to do so to meet their family's needs.

Allowing insurers to move as preemptorily as this bill would allow to void a debtor's license and registration will thus cause more drivers to struggle to escape debt traps after a judgment and to face further legal jeopardy that may put themselves and their families in even more difficult situations even as it makes it harder for the claimant to recover the judgment owed..

We oppose **SB 373** and ask you to give the bill an **Unfavorable Report**.

Sincerely,
Franz Schneiderman, Consumer Auto