

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 38:

Failure to Pay Video Toll - Reform of Penalties

TO: Chairman Kumar P. Barve and members of the Environment & Transportation Committee

FROM: Caryn York, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: February 6, 2020

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 strongly support HB 38 as a means to eliminate the criminalization of poverty, reducing the impact of fines and fees for low wage workers in the State of Maryland.

JOTF's recently released report entitled, "The Criminalization of Poverty," studies how the fines and fees burden the poor, even once they are released. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, almost 50% of Marylanders drive to another county for work. Both Maryland and Virginia have the highest cross-county commuter rate in the nation. This means that access to vehicular transportation is vital to the success of workers in Maryland, especially those from lower-income neighborhoods. Having a suspended registration from unpaid video toll will cripple a worker's ability to obtain or sustain employment.

The employment opportunities for individuals with a suspended driver's license are nearly nonexistent, especially for the low-wage worker. Many of the jobs they are eligible to even apply for require a valid driver's license such as jobs in construction, plumbing, sales, and jobs that require a registration. Additionally, Maryland's regional economy and 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.

HB 38 seeks to address the issue along with limiting the maximum civil penalty that may be set by the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) for failure to pay a video toll to \$5 (the current penalty, which is established by regulation, is \$50) and requires any outstanding penalty for a civil citation assessed on or before September 30, 2020, to be reduced to \$5. The bill also repeals the authority of the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to suspend the registration of a motor vehicle because the registered owner of the vehicle incurred a toll violation and failed to pay the toll and any associated civil penalties.

Working families, particularly low wage workers, need access to affordable, reliable transportation to get to work and to meet life's demands. For these reasons, we urge a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 38.

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