

February 19, 2020

To: The Honorable Luke Clippinger  
Chair, Judiciary Committee

From: Jason Butler

Re: HB 280 Vehicle Laws – Suspension of Driver’s License or Registration – Unpaid Citations or Judgments (**SUPPORT**)

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The existing legislation and its penalties as they presently exist prove to unfairly burden and potentially criminalize individuals who may be otherwise willing to comply with financial obligations to the state. That is what happened to me.

I’m a single custodial father of four and have had to make some very difficult decisions regarding which bills I pay and when depending upon my job situation. There are times when you have to decide if you pay for the basic means of survival, or if you choose to pay your financial obligations. Once a person re-enters the work world, the fines and criminal charges can accrue making it nearly impossible to recover and to get on track financially. In addition, citizens face the potential of jail time for trying to work or commute to work to get their financial affairs in order.

I was once locked up behind these laws and that blemish has remained on my record, making the ability to go out and earn a living exceptionally difficult. Much of my work has been as a field engineer where I drive to and from client sites making repairs. Driving is not an option for me, it’s a job requirement. Even with the motor vehicle insurance system currently in place, these driver’s license suspensions result in higher rates for motorists based not upon unsafe driving practices, but simply the inability to pay for minor traffic fines/fees.

The potential to strip away a person’s ability to provide for their family, and even to penalize someone to the point of incarceration for what amounts to an unpaid bill is unconstitutional. It quite frankly circumvents the 1833 federal laws intended to end debtor’s prison.

I have a criminal record at this point in time for having a hard time paying bills. Please help to right this wrong and help Marylanders to overcome the cycles of debt and poverty. We can’t continue to criminalize the poor for being poor. Please take a stand for some of your most vulnerable constituents. I urge a favorable report on HB 280.