

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB291:

Vehicle Laws – Failure to Pay Video Toll – Outstanding Fines

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

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: January 21, 2021

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 291 as a means to reduce the impact of fines and fees for the working class 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 not only means that access to vehicular transportation is vital to the success of workers in Maryland, but also that toll roads are more likely to be used. Housing instability for lower-income workers has been well documented during this pandemic. For example, the pew research center reported that 52% of young adults have moved in with parents in response to the pandemic. Thanks to issues regarding delays within the USPS many of those who have transferred location have been unable to receive mail and are experiencing increased fines to their motor vehicle record during an economic depression thanks to the pandemic.

HB291 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 \$25 (the current penalty, which is established by regulation, is \$50). The working class need access to affordable higher education, consistent employment, and reliable transportation in order to meet life's demands and *not* excess fines for tolls they may not have even known they used. For these reasons, we urge a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 291.