



Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB 139 – Driver’s Licenses – Suspension for Child Support Arrearages -- Exception
Position: Favorable

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

Feb. 7, 2024

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members,

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

We support **SB 139** because it will protect many low- and middle-income drivers who owe child support against the burdensome and counter-productive punishment of losing their right to drive – a sanction that not only can put lower-income Maryland drivers at risk of serious further punishment but undermines their ability to earn a living and, ultimately, to meet their child support obligations.

Paying child support is an important obligation. But for many lower-income, non-custodial parents, it's a difficult burden to meet. As a 2019 Abell Foundation report found, many noncustodial parents “struggle to find and maintain full-time work at sufficient wages to support themselves and pay their child support obligations.”¹ With the median income of non-custodial parents statewide less than \$23,000 and 25% receiving supplemental food benefits (as the Abell report found in 2019²), it's not surprising that many parents fall behind in their child support payments.

And when they do, Maryland law makes it very easy for them to lose their licenses, allowing driver's licenses to be suspended when parents are 60 days behind in their payments. But when a parent loses the right to drive, that only makes it harder for him or her to get to work and access the job opportunities that could enable them to meet their needs and child support obligations. This is especially true in Baltimore City, where weak public transit systems and the movement of many job centers to the suburbs makes it very difficult and time-consuming to reach remunerative work without a vehicle.

Once a person's license is suspended, he or she is subject to a up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine for driving on a suspended or revoked license. When people violate the law by driving – as many people do, in part because they need to do so to meet their obligations – that can extend a

¹ https://abell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Child20Support20Report202_20_202020edits2020-20web20version.pdf

² Ibid,



Auto Consumer Alliance
13900 Laurel Lakes Avenue, Suite 100
Laurel, MD 20707

cycle of poverty and punishment that often leaves people with even greater legal difficulties, more deeply in debt – and less able to pay their child support and meet other needs.

Suspending the licenses of lower-income Marylanders who owe child support adds to their financial and legal challenges as it undermines their ability to pay their debts and to support themselves and their families.

That's part of the reason the Abell Foundation report recommends stopping the practice of suspending the driver's licenses of lower-income Marylanders who owe child support.³ And why, as **SB 139** mandates, it makes good sense to end the practice of doing so for Marylanders who make 250% of federal poverty level wages or less.

We support SB 139 and ask you to give it a FAVORABLE report.

Sincerely,

Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto

³ Ibid.