



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 311:

Child Support - Suspension of Driver's Licenses

TO: Hon. Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Wendy Blackwell, Director of Practitioners Leadership Institute

DATE: February 1st, 2024

I am Wendy Blackwell Fortune, Director of Practitioners Leadership Institute for the Center of Urban Families, a workforce program in Baltimore City that advocates for legislative initiatives to help families achieve stability and economic success. We support House Bill 311 because it supports families by ensuring that the harm caused by removing a parent's ability to drive is only used in appropriate cases.

According to a University of Minnesota report, only 8.5% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one hour, one way by public transit, making access to a valid driver's license and car vital to securing employment. However, The MVA reported that they suspended 22,000 driver's licenses for child support arrears last year - primarily in Baltimore City - an increase of 5,000 since 2022. Many of these suspensions were of CFUF members, disproportionately from lower-income urban communities, who have struggled to obtain or maintain sufficient employment to pay back their arrears. This is especially true for our returning citizens, as child support payments *do not stop* while an individual is incarcerated. What's worse is that many of our members have primary custody over their children but still have their licenses suspended due to inaccuracies in the reporting system. The suspension mechanism is not an effective compliance tool for our members or Baltimore City Residents.

In Baltimore, 57 percent of noncustodial parents were employed, and 47 percent earned the minimum wage or less but owed an average of \$13,300 in unpaid arrearages. They will never pay down this debt, especially when the current law magnifies the issue by crippling their mobility. Additionally, [a report cited](#) by the Abell Foundation found that **42% of individuals who had their licenses suspended lost jobs as a result of the suspension, 45% of those who lost jobs could not find another job, and 88% of those who were able to find another job reported a decrease in income.**

House Bill 311 seeks to resolve this by ensuring that before the Child Support Enforcement Administration notifies the MVA of an obligor in arrears, a circuit court hearing needs to be established to determine if the suspension is appropriate. It examines an obligor's current contributions to the child and the impact of license suspensions on the obligor's employment prospects, transportation access, and relationship with the child. This is a rational approach to ensuring that the state is not needlessly endangering the well-being of families by limiting the obligor's access to employment and quality time with their child. For these reasons, I urge a favorable report.