

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF SENATE BILL 195/ HOUSE BILL 218:

Family Law – Child Support

TO: Members of the House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Michael Ross

DATE: February 20th, 2025

My name is Michael Ross. I am a resident of **District 46** in Baltimore and oppose SENATE BILL 195 / HOUSE BILL 218 due to the increasing penalties for fathers like me, which doesn't address many of the issues associated with enforcement.

In 2009, my daughter was born to me and my then-girlfriend. We stuck it out together to raise our child until 2012, when it was discovered that she had severe mental health issues. Life happens to us all, but where it became painful was that she refused to let me see my daughter even though there was no hearing for custody. She placed me on child support for the sole purpose of securing state assistance which would have been fine if she had informed me of her plan and not led to garnishments in my wages. My license was suspended immediately since I was unaware of the payments, and my wages were garnished. Again, there was no court order or hearing that I was informed of, but before I knew it, I was driving illegally. In 2015, CPS picked up my daughter from her mother, stating that her mental state continued to deteriorate. At this point, I decided enough was enough and fought in court to receive custody of my daughter, which I achieved in October 2015.

I thought that would end the drama, but it did not. My wages continued to be garnished, and my license stayed suspended despite my having full custody of my daughter. My wages and taxes were intercepted through 2019, again, despite having full custody of my daughter. For years, I spoke with the child support administration to sort out my case - showing them that I have full custody of my daughter, but the suspension was never lifted. This put me in danger whenever I stepped outside to take her to the doctor, school, or even to visit her mother since it is illegal to drive on a suspended license.

In 2019, Maryland Legal Aid sorted out my situation and fought the Child Support Administration to lift my license suspension and receive the intercepted taxes. Stacy Bensky of Legal Aid has helped me secure \$4360 in tax intercepts and 4-5 backed child support payments, and we are still fighting for the rest. Child Support has been brutal - but my biggest concern was the loss of my license and wages. I'm currently a facilities manager at a high-rise building in Baltimore, but we travel often. I can't continue to risk losing access to my license. If I can't drive, then I can't work; if I can't work, NO ONE will take care of my daughter.

SENATE BILL 195 / HOUSE BILL 218 sharply increases penalties on parents like me trying to protect our access to employment from what can be a needlessly predatory system (the child support system). Unless this bill is heavily amended to cap wage garnishments and fix the license suspension issue, I can not support SENATE BILL 195 / HOUSE BILL 218.

