

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 15/ HOUSE BILL 681:**

### **Child Support - Driver's License Suspension for Arrearages and Court Orders**

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

FROM: **The Sayra & Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts**

Shanta Trivedi serves as the Faculty Director and Aubrey Edwards-Luce is the Executive Director of the Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CFCC) at the University of Baltimore School of Law. CFCC envisions communities where children and families thrive without unnecessary involvement in the legal system. We engage communities as we work tirelessly to transform systems that create barriers to family well-being. CFCC supports SENATE BILL 15/ HOUSE BILL 681 to repeal the punitive practice of driver's license suspensions for lower-income obligors.

Mobility is key in Maryland's regional economy. The Census Bureau reported that almost [40% of Marylanders travel outside their county for employment](#). This statistic is more pronounced for lower-income communities of color where there is a scarcity of jobs available by public transit. [Only 8.5% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one hour, one way by public transit](#). Thus, a valid driver's license and a vehicle are necessary for economic sustainability.

In 2015, NPR reported that 62% of Marylanders who owe child support make less than minimum wage but owe at least \$10,000 in unpaid arrearages. They will never pay this debt, especially when the current law magnifies the issue by crippling their mobility. [Maryland Code Ann., Fam. Law § 10-119](#) states that upon 60 days of nonpayment of child support, an obligor shall have their license or privilege to drive suspended. Beyond this, [Maryland Code Ann., Transportation §16-303](#) states that driving on an invalid license (suspended, canceled, or revoked) in Maryland is a crime punishable by up to (1) one year in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both. As such, child support debt triggers a suspended driver's license, arrest, or hefty fines, further complicating the ability of low-wage workers to secure employment and make payments.

Data suggests that this issue is racialized as well, adversely disrupting the lives of African Americans. Although Blacks people comprise 31.1% of Maryland's population, [MDOT data suggests](#) they made up to 71% of the roughly 27,000 license suspensions between 2015 - 2020. If a disproportionately higher number of black Marylanders lack access to a valid driver's license due to license suspensions and are blocked from participating in a mobile economy, it stands to reason that current state policy is actively preventing them from making payments.

SENATE BILL 15 / HOUSE BILL 681 ends suspending licenses for child support arrears of those making less than 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or \$38k annually. No evidence suggests suspending an individual's driver's license improves arrears collection for persons at this income level in the long run. Suspending licenses for lower-income obligors contradicts the stated purpose of increasing compliance in child support payments and engagement with family where appropriate. It cripples the primary way the Child Support Enforcement Agency can collect (wage garnishments) by eliminating access to employment needed to pay down arrears. **We urge a favorable report on SENATE BILL 15 / HOUSE BILL 681 for these reasons.**