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Proponent Testimony in Support of House Bill 260

To: Transportation and Public Safety Committee, The Ohio House of Representatives
Chairman Green; Vice Chair Greenspan; Ranking Member Sheehy; Representative DeVitis;
Representative Householder; Representative Howse; Representative Hughes; Representative
Johnson; Representative Keller; Representative Kick; Representative Lepore-Hagan;
Representative Manning; Representative Patton; Representative Reece; Representative West

From: Patrick Higgins, Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation Justice for All Fellow, Ohio Poverty Law
Center

Date: Wednesday, November 8, 2017

Chairman Green, Vice Chair Greenspan, Ranking Member Sheehy, and Committee Members,

I, on behalf of the Ohio Poverty Law Center, support HB 260 because of the disproportionate impact of license suspensions on low-income people, especially low-income people of color here in Ohio. Poor Ohioans should not be punished for being poor. Further, if we are to expect Ohioans to pay court costs and fines and fulfill other obligations to the state, we should not take away their means to do so. For this reason, among others, the Ohio Poverty Law Center enthusiastically supports House Bill 260.

The Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC) is a nonprofit law office that advocates for evidence-based policies aimed at protecting and expanding the rights of low-income Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty. OPLC works closely with Ohio legal aid agencies in promoting access to healthcare, family stability, and expanded justice and opportunity. House Bill 260 makes progress toward all three.

The poorest people in Ohio see the highest rates of license suspensions.¹ In a report published early this year by the Cleveland Plain Dealer, data from the BMV and U.S. Census Bureau

¹ See *License suspensions disproportionately imposed on poor Ohioans, trapping them in debt*, http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2017/03/license_suspensions_disproport_1.html.

demonstrated that, in Ohio zip codes where at least 50 percent of residents are below 200 percent poverty level, there are 99 license suspensions for every 1,000 residents. In zip codes where more 50 percent of the population is over 200 percent of the poverty level, that number drops to 28 suspensions for every 1,000 residents.² Imagine being financially unable to pay your obligation to a court and having that same court take away your driver's license that allows you to drop your children off at child care, get to work, and seek treatment for a medical issue.

Driver's licenses, especially in Ohio's rural areas, help Ohioans get to work where public transportation cannot. With employment, Ohioans gain self-sufficiency, support their families, and contribute to stable communities. Work is critical to stopping cycles of mass incarceration and poverty. When the state suspends driver's licenses without the limited privilege of driving to work or job training, Ohioans with suspended licenses are given limited choices: follow the law and stay home from work, depend on another individual for transportation, or break the law and continue driving with a suspended license. When viewed through the lens of a life in poverty where a day's wages make the difference between feeding one's family or not, purchasing life-saving medication or not, and getting a child to school or not, the choice of whether to drive becomes more of a necessity than a luxury.

In addition to getting Ohioans back to work, we strongly support the other limited privileges granted in the bill because they underscore the previously-stated values held at the core of the Ohio Poverty Law Center: access to healthcare, family stability, and expanded justice and opportunity. When a person with a suspended license gets the limited privileges granted by HB 260, people get to work and training to support themselves and their families, those in need get treatment, children get to daycare and school, parties show up to court, and the rest of us do better because of it. House Bill 260 does not offer an unrestricted return of the driver's license. Instead, it ensures that individuals whose licenses are suspended for non-driving offenses have the means to get back in good standing instead of falling further into poverty.

I hope that my testimony, in addition to this bill's bipartisan support, leads you to the same conclusion: this legislation highlights our values of reducing poverty and ensuring that all Ohioans have a chance to succeed.

² *Id.*