

TO: House Criminal Justice Committee
FROM: Gary Daniels, Chief Lobbyist, ACLU of Ohio
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RE: Senate Bill 68 – Proponent Testimony



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To Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present proponent testimony on Senate Bill 68.

SB 68 is an uncomplicated, bipartisan bill but its significance should not go unnoticed or unappreciated. As this committee has previously heard, the purpose of SB 68 is to allow courts to offer community service in lieu of cash payment for the reinstatement of suspended drivers' licenses for those who cannot afford the reinstatement fees.

Importantly, under SB 68, courts are not required to provide this option and Ohioans are not forced to engage in community service. SB 68 merely provides additional choices.

According to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, at least 1.1 million Ohioans had a suspended license in 2017. It is not a secret the overwhelming majority of those with suspended licenses do not stop driving. This dynamic can and does lead to many difficulties for your constituents in this situation. For too many, it can result in a downward spiral resulting in ever more fines, fees, and punishment.

For example, the person who continues to drive without a license may be stopped by law enforcement. For whatever reason – fear, anxiety, lack of transportation, money, or childcare, or something else – they decline to show up to court. A warrant is put out for their arrest. They are stopped again and find themselves in even more trouble. If/when they do arrive in court, their problems are now much more serious and expensive than a suspended license.

SB 68 seeks to alleviate the myriad of problems suspended drivers' licenses creates by providing an additional option for people to get their licenses back. The hope is community service, instead of cash payment, will lead to less Ohioans with a suspended license.

Together with this session's HB 285, which makes permanent Ohio's fee reinstatement amnesty period, Ohio is on the right path to finding common sense, practical solutions to this vexing problem.

Of course, another solution that would go a long way towards alleviating this problem would be 1) to reduce, via state law, the number of offenses and reasons that allow for license suspensions, particularly those with no relationship to operating a motor vehicle or public safety and 2) lower the cost of the reinstatement fees to minimize their punitive purposes. The ACLU of Ohio encourages the legislature to continue its work in this regard and we are happy to work with the members to accomplish this goal.

Senate Bill 68 is an important piece of this larger puzzle. We hope members of this committee agree and will support this bill.