

Testimony of Jeffrey T. Stavroff
The Ohio House of Representatives
133rd General Assembly
Ohio House Bill No. 285
September 17, 2019

Chair Green, Vice Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jeffrey Stavroff. I am an attorney and manage my own law practice, The Stavroff Law Firm. My primary area of practice is criminal law and related areas, including traffic offenses. I have practiced both sides of criminal law, as a prosecuting attorney with the Columbus City Attorney's Office, and as a defense attorney in private practice. House Bill 285's mandate—making permanent the driver's license reinstatement fee debt reduction and amnesty program—is a common sense solution to a systemic problem affecting many of our state's citizens. As an attorney who represents clients dealing with these specific issues, I have firsthand knowledge that this program works. I urge you to make this program law.

Generally, citizens who are charged with driver's license related offenses answer their charges in one of our state's municipal courts, county courts, or mayor's courts. Driver's license related offenses include driving under suspension, driving without a valid operator's license, failure to reinstate, among many others. Every day, citizens appear in court for traffic tickets charging them with these offenses. Many of these citizens have accrued a high balance of license reinstatement fees owed to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). In the most extreme cases, tens of thousands of dollars—to simply reinstate a driver's license.

Driver's license related offenses disproportionately affect one of the most vulnerable groups in our community: the poor. H.B. 285's debt reduction and amnesty program incentivizes

citizens, who are experiencing tough financial times, to get valid and stay in compliance with state law.

The way a person finds themselves drowning in BMV reinstatement fees is common. A person may accrue reinstatement fees for failing to show insurance after receiving a traffic ticket, failing to appear in court, or failing to pay a fine. When a person is debating paying their mortgage or rent, or providing for their family, versus paying their reinstatement fees, people are going to do what they need to do to survive. Over time, the reinstatement fees rise and the person remains a non-licensed driver. The problem—and the fees—compound, and make it difficult to not only repay the fees, but also get a valid driver's license.

The solution? H.B. 285.

The debt reduction and amnesty program is not an end run around Ohio law. The law is clear and unequivocal: no person shall operate a motor vehicle without a valid license, or while under suspension, or without paying their reinstatement fees, or without satisfying other conditions ordered by the BMV. H.B. 285 does not change or abolish those laws. Rather, it gives the financially vulnerable members of our state a boost during difficult times and encourages compliance with the law.

I encourage every member of this committee to visit Franklin County Municipal Court, just a few blocks south of the Ohio Statehouse. Franklin County Municipal Court is one of the busiest courthouses in our state. Every day, citizens go to its traffic arraignment court to answer traffic tickets they receive charging them with driver's license related offenses. Take a seat in the courtroom, watch, and listen. Watch the people who come before the court, and listen to their problems. After doing so, I guarantee that each of you will more clearly understand the scope and magnitude of this problem. H.B. 285 is a tool that can solve this problem.

I respectfully request this committee to make H.B. 285 the law of this state. I thank you for your time and attention.