

Stow Municipal Court

Judge Kim R. Hoover
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Testimony in Support of HB 285

John W. Clark, Magistrate

Stow Municipal Court

Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee

January 21, 2020

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee, I am John Clark. I am the Chief Magistrate at Stow Municipal Court where I have served as a magistrate for over 20 years. Each year, I deal with hundreds of defendants charged with driving under suspension. I have also been actively involved with license clinics around the State of Ohio and participated in an Ohio State Bar Association Video Continuing Legal Education Course instructing volunteers on how to assist suspended drivers to obtain their license. In addition, I have authored a guide to assist volunteers in this regard.

A suspended license places a significant burden on the suspended driver, impacting everything from their employment to driving their children to school. This burden is magnified when the driver does not have the financial resources to pay Bureau of Motor Vehicles reinstatement fees. Many Ohioans have reached a point with reinstatement fees that they have given up ever getting a license, leaving them with the options of being unproductive citizens or violating the law by driving and incurring further suspensions and reinstatement fees. Amnesty and fee reduction give these citizens hope and opens to them the possibility of obtaining their license, legally driving and being productive and insured citizens.

The impact of the amnesty/fee reduction program thus far has been enormous. I have dealt with hundreds of people who had given up ever obtaining a valid license

whose lives were significantly improved as a result of the program. They have voiced to me that they had given up and would have never paid a penny of their thousands of dollars in reinstatement fees but with a reduction saw an opportunity to pay an amount they could afford and would do so. As a result, the amnesty and fee reductions have actually resulted in the State receiving funds they would otherwise have never collected.

Another issue with the original version of amnesty was its limitation of indigency to those qualifying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. The current bill's extension of eligibility to those who receive Medicaid, Ohio Works First, Supplemental Security Income, and Veteran's Affairs benefits in addition to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is most welcome. This much needed expansion will allow more individuals who are genuinely indigent to benefit from this essential program.

In my time as a Magistrate, the driver's license suspension laws have significantly improved and become much more understandable, reasonable and logical. The amnesty/fee reduction program has been a valuable extension and continuation of this progress that should now become permanent.

Thank you and the Committee for your work on this bill and your efforts to assist the citizens of our state. I would be more than happy to discuss this matter with any member of the committee.