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Testimony in Support of House Bill 336
Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee
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Fellow
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Chair LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Schiavoni, and Committee Members, my name is Patrick Higgins and I am an attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center.

The Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC) supports House Bill 336 because it creates a pilot program that would prohibit the imposition of driver's license reinstatement fees under certain circumstances. Further, driver's license reinstatement initiatives like that created in HB 336 alleviate one of the many barriers experienced by low-income Ohioans.

OPLC advocates for evidence-based policies that protect and expand the rights of low-income Ohioans. We are a non-profit law firm working closely with Ohio's legal aid community serving Ohioans who are living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

Driver's license reinstatement fees are a poverty issue because the poorest Ohioans see the highest rate of driver's license suspensions. An investigation by Cleveland.com¹ revealed that, in zip codes where more than half of the population lives below 200% of the poverty level, there are 99 license suspensions for every 1,000 residents. In zip codes where more than half of the population lives above 200% of the poverty level, the suspension rate drops to 28 for every 1,000 residents.

The disproportionate imposition of driver's license suspensions yields a similarly disproportionate number of poor Ohioans who face license reinstatement fees that stand between

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.

them and the ability to *legally* drive to work, job training programs, the grocery store, medical appointments, and other necessary elements of daily life. This becomes especially important in Ohio's rural areas and others with limited access to public transportation.

When we permit indigent Ohioans to get right with the law and drive with a valid license, we break a cycle of criminalized poverty that traps many of our most vulnerable Ohioans in jeopardy of further trouble with the law when driving just like the rest of us do: to places like work, school, and the grocery store. In this cycle, most who cannot afford their license reinstatement fees simply do not have the choice of whether to drive or not—they must. If they're pulled over, they face a growing pile of insurmountable court debt and a criminal record, which creates additional barriers to necessities such as employment and housing.

As it was acknowledged during sponsor testimony, we know that that a suspended license does not mean Ohioans stay off the road. Withholding the ability to drive with a license likely means one thing for a poor Ohioan with a suspended license, the possibility that she or he faces another penalty that she or he cannot afford. By passing HB 336, we will try another way, which we believe is the better way for low-income Ohioans.

With this pilot program, low-income Ohioans will have the opportunity to reinstate their driver's licenses and travel to places like work, training, treatment, and the grocery store without further jeopardizing an already-precarious relationship with the legal system. HB 336 is a step toward breaking a cycle of poverty, and Ohio as a whole will be better for it. For these reasons, we urge you to support HB 336 and are happy to answer any questions that you may have.