

Chair Green, Vice Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, please accept my highest and unconditional support of the Ohio Reinstatement Amnesty Program (HB 285). I have been a judge in the Cleveland Municipal Court for 18 years. A large portion of my cases are driver license related. Of the license charges, the underlying issue for many license suspension cases is failure to pay reinstatement fees. These fees are collateral sanctions for many traffic related convictions. The failure to pay these fees hinders drivers to go to work and tend to their family and household responsibilities. The failure to pay is due to limited resources. More than likely, it was limited resources that caused the imposition of the reinstatement fee in the first instance.

Our court was very excited to hear of the Ohio BMV Reinstatement Fee Amnesty Initiative.  The Amnesty Program provided a limited opportunity for suspended drivers to get on the road again legally. We met several months to strategically plan our efforts to notify and assist the members of the community to take full advantage of the amnesty opportunity. We partnered with the Greater Cleveland Bar Association, Cuyahoga County Office of the Public Defender, Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles, Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, Cleveland Clerk of Court, Former State Representative John Barnes, Councilmen Kevin Conwell and Basheer Jones. This collaboration was critical to ensure we maximize outreach to the community. Additionally, their assistance in putting our outreach efforts together is representative of the large support of the amnesty program. Without the support of these partners, our efforts would have been minimal.

In preparation of the outreach, we had over 70 people trained, including 40 attorneys, who received information on license laws and the amnesty program. Next, we prepared a webpage on the amnesty program. It was our hope to reach as many people as possible. We have received over 9,000 inquiries on the webpage .Although the program is over, we continue to receive inquires on the webpage.

In order to avoid long lines and maximize consultations on the program, we set up 3 different dates for phones banks where callers could talk to someone about the program. . The first phone bank was held on March 15. We received over 2,300 calls on 16 phone lines.   Finally, we went out into the community and held face to consultations with attorneys and drivers who had suspended licenses.  The on-site consultations resulted in over $300,000 in restatement fees being reduced or eliminated. We are confident a much larger number was reduced or eliminated by people who utilized the webpage and did not need a consultation with an attorney.

Clearly, the effort of the partners and huge response from people in the community demonstrate a need for continuation of the amnesty program. We have people who are struggling in our community financially. These financial burdens cause the imposition of the reinstatement fees and the financial burdens preclude or delay payment of the fees. Unfortunately, many in our community find themselves in a vicious cycle of valid and then suspended licenses due to economic hardships. The amnesty program provides an opportunity to for drivers to get back on the right track. I urge you to support House Bill 285.

Sincerely,

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Judge, Cleveland Municipal Court

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