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**Testimony in Support of HB 285**  
**Megan O'Dell, Attorney**  
**Ohio Poverty Law Center**  
**House Transportation and Public Safety Committee**  
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Chair Green, Vice Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, my name is Megan O'Dell, and I am an attorney at the Ohio Poverty Law Center. The Ohio Poverty Law Center 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. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 285, to establish a driver's license reinstatement fee debt reduction program.

In Ohio, the state can suspend an individual's license for more than 30 reasons, and there are over three million suspensions on Ohio driver's licenses. Most of these suspensions are for offenses unrelated to safe and responsible vehicle operation. To reinstate a driver's license, an individual must pay a fee that is associated with each suspension. These range from \$15 to \$650 per suspension. It is not uncommon for an individual to have multiple suspensions and owe hundreds or thousands of dollars to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). These fees owed to the BMV and those available to be waived or reduced under House Bill 285 are separate from the court fines an individual may owe for court cases related to traffic offenses.

House Bill 336 from the 132<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly created the six-month Reinstatement Fee Amnesty Initiative to address these issues, which allowed the BMV to waive or reduce reinstatement fees on eligible suspensions. House Bill 285 mirrors the language of House Bill 336 but expands indigency eligibility requirements for those receiving a waiver of reinstatement fees to individuals receiving Medicaid, Ohio Works First, Supplemental Security Income, and Veteran's Affairs benefits in addition to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Expanding eligibility means that more individuals who are indigent will be able to have fees waived by providing proof of eligibility to the BMV.

The Amnesty Initiative had an incredible effect on individuals with driver's license suspensions. Nearly 77,000 individuals were assisted by the pilot program, saving \$63 million dollars. The BMV also collected \$3.6 million in reinstatement fees from the program, an amount that the BMV may have never collected in the first place. When individuals have their fees reduced or waived, they are given a new sense of possibility, and many were able to pay the remainder of their fees. Legal clinics were held statewide, partnering legal aid offices, the BMV, local courts, job and family services offices, child support agencies, and insurance companies. As a result of this collaboration, individuals had license suspensions shortened, started making child support payments, purchased car insurance, and were steps closer to getting a valid driver's license. At a three-day clinic in Franklin County, applicants saved

\$373,000 in reinstatement fees. Chris, who attended that clinic, stated that the clinic gave him a second chance at life. After most of his fees were waived, he paid the remaining \$300, took his driver's license test, and now has a license. In Perry County, where over 75 percent of residents are employed outside the county, 72 people attended a clinic and collectively saved \$20,000 in fees. In Delaware County, the BMV waived \$2500 in reinstatement fees. Adam, who attended the clinic, received full driving privileges and stated that he had a lifechanging experience.

Because most Ohioans drive themselves to work, particularly in rural areas of our state, a valid driver's license is a necessity. However, when an individual cannot afford to reinstate their license, they are forced to risk driving without a license or lose their job. The six-month pilot of the Amnesty Initiative has proven to be lucrative and beneficial not only for Ohio drivers, but also for the BMV, families receiving child support, and the state. Although so many individuals were assisted through the pilot program, there are hundreds of thousands more who were unable to take advantage of the program. Making the program permanent would allow more low-income drivers to get back on the road and back to work. Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.