

# FINES AND FEES JUSTICE CENTER

December 9, 2024

The Honorable Haraz N. Ghanbari  
Chair, Homeland Security Committee  
77 South High Street, Floor 13  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chair Ghanbari and Members of the Committee,

The Fines and Fees Justice Center (FFJC) is grateful to Chair Ghanbari and this committee, and to Senator Blessing and Senator Ingram, for continuing to advance SB 37. This legislation ends the practice of suspending driver's licenses for failure to pay a court fine or fee and requires automatic reinstatement of licenses previously suspended only for that reason. It also adds reasonable safeguards to reduce license suspensions related to failure to pay child support. We support this legislation, and we urge a positive vote.

FFJC is a national hub for information, advocacy and collaboration for reform of fines and fees, including eliminating the onerous collateral consequences that result from nonpayment of fines and fees, like driver's license restrictions. Not having a valid driver's license makes life nearly impossible for most people, preventing them from going to work, getting a new job, taking their child to school or childcare, going to medical appointments, and even getting to the grocery store. Because most people require a car to access necessities, they have no choice but to continue driving. When they do, they risk additional fines, fees, and arrest and jail time for driving with an invalid license.

**Because debt-based driver's license suspensions are counterproductive, they don't improve collection rates.** Study after study, from Texas<sup>1</sup> to Tennessee<sup>2</sup>, has shown that suspensions do not make it more likely that people will pay their fines and fees. What does work is ensuring that fines and fees are set at an amount that people can actually afford and providing alternative ways to satisfy the financial obligations when people cannot pay.

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Fair Defense Project & Texas Appleseed, *Driven by Debt: The Failure of the OmniBase Program* (Aug. 2021), available at <https://www.texasappleseed.org/sites/default/files/OmniBaseRevenueReport-Aug11-Final.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> ThinkTennessee, *Reducing the Harms of Court Debt: Driver's License Revocations are an Ineffective Policy for Increasing Court Collections* (Nov. 2022), available at <https://www.thinktennessee.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/drivers-license-revocation-report.pdf>.

**Driver's license suspensions are a major barrier to stable employment.** Over 40% of people lose their job when they lose their license.<sup>3</sup> A valid driver's license is a greater predictor of employment than a high school diploma. Taking away one's driver's licenses for nonpayment of fines and fees is completely counterproductive, making it much harder, if not impossible, for them to earn the money needed to lift the suspension. With over a million debt-based driver's license suspensions across Ohio,<sup>4</sup> businesses struggle to fill vacant positions, and the state loses out on revenue from income, sales and gas taxes.

Debt-based license suspensions force people who cannot afford the fines and fees to make an impossible choice: stop driving and lose access to work & basic necessities — or keep driving to survive, risking more fines and fees, arrest and even incarceration. Police and courts end up spending scarce resources on arrests for driving with a suspended license due to debt. **This turns police into debt collectors and consumes valuable time they could otherwise spend on violent and serious crime.**

**This session, the Ohio legislature can break the cycle of debt, punishment and criminal justice system involvement that is fueled by suspending driver's licenses for failure to pay court fines and fees.** SB 37 would eliminate these suspensions, while leaving all suspensions imposed for dangerous driving untouched and intact. We urge you to prioritize the financial stability of Ohio families and the safety of all our communities by passing this critical legislation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Anna Odegaard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anna" and last name "Odegaard" clearly visible.

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<sup>3</sup> New Jersey Department of Transportation Bureau of Research, *"Driver's License Suspensions, Impacts and Fairness Study,"* (August 2007), available at [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://vtc.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/MVC-DL-Suspension-Study-Final-Report-Vol1\\_9-13-07\\_.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://vtc.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/MVC-DL-Suspension-Study-Final-Report-Vol1_9-13-07_.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, *"Road to Nowhere: Debt-related driver's license suspensions in Ohio,"* (September, 2022), available at <https://lasclv.org/roadtonowherereport/>.