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LEVIN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND EDUCATION

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Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Homeland Security Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 37. My name is Brian Mikelbank. I am an Associate Professor of Urban Studies at Cleveland State University and a Visiting Scholar at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. My testimony today represents my individual opinions, not those of Cleveland State University or the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

My testimony is based on nearly four years of analyzing debt-related driver's license suspension data from the Ohio BMV. Our BMV data cover 5 years, roughly 1,200 Ohio ZIP Codes, and eight different types of debt-related driver's license suspension. We have data on licensed and unlicensed drivers, as well as charges, payments, and outstanding debt for each suspension type. Amongst all of the intricacies and nuances of these data, it is one basic finding that consistently grabs audiences when I present my research: Ohio suspends more driver's licenses for debt than for dangerous driving.

Passing SB 37 would be an important and impactful step in improving the lives of those who are currently without a driver's license not because they are bad drivers, but because they owe someone money. Three out of every four workers in Ohio drive alone to work (American Community Survey, 2023). At best, suspending a driver's license is a substantial hurdle to being a productive member of the state's workforce. At worst it is likewise a suspension – preventing over 1.5 million drivers a year from seeking and/or maintaining employment, but also hindering the everyday tasks of an engaged citizen, such as volunteering, church, medical care, shopping, visiting with friends, taking care of the needs of family, etc. SB 37 would be a step towards correcting the nearly incomprehensible policy design of penalizing someone for owing money by restricting their ability to get to work to earn the money necessary to repay that debt.

Below I present detail on four findings, focused on our most recent year of data, 2020:

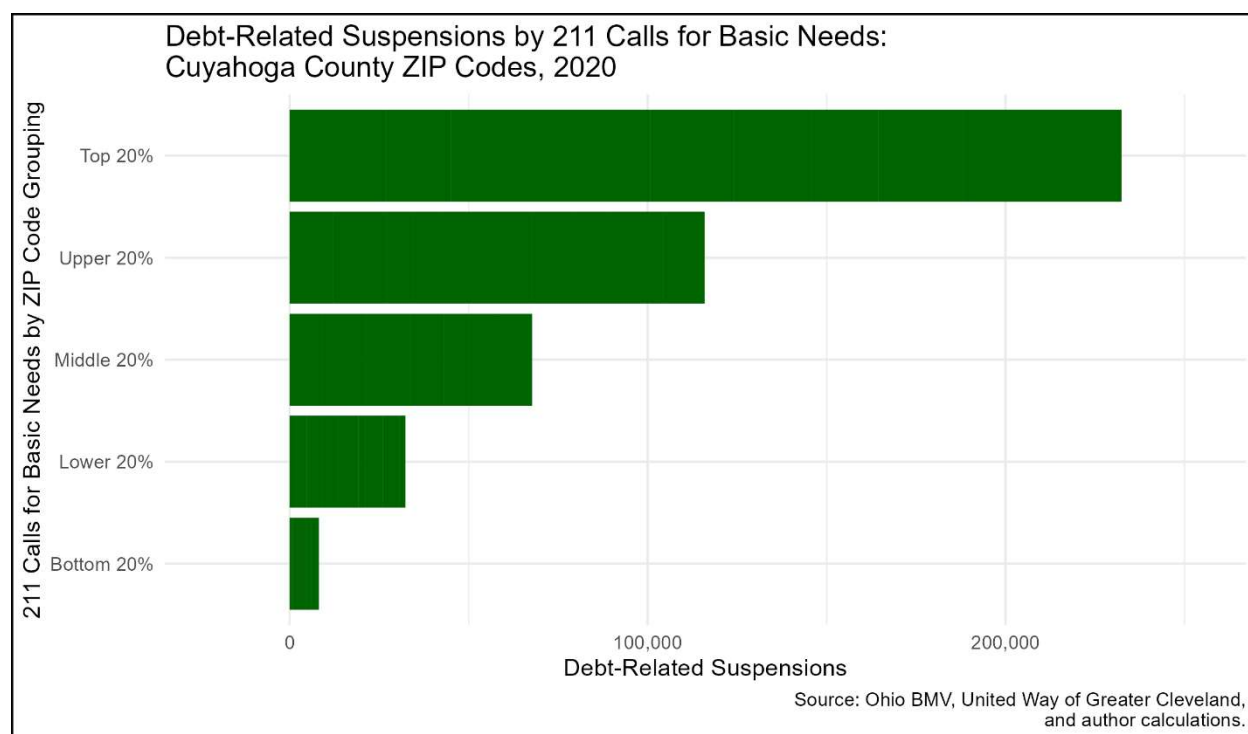
1. **SB 37 would make a major impact on those who are struggling to meet their basic needs.**
2. **SB 37 would make a major impact on those who are struggling to meet their transportation needs.**
3. **Statewide, SB 37 would provide relief in Ohio's highest poverty ZIP Codes.**
4. **Statewide, SB 37 would provide relief in Ohio's most diverse ZIP Codes.**

Finding 1:

SB 37 would make a major impact on those who are struggling to meet their basic needs.

In Cuyahoga County, the United Way of Greater Cleveland operates the 211 first call for help hotline. The graph below shows five groups of Cuyahoga County ZIP Codes, ranked from the highest number of Basic Needs calls to 211 (Top 20%) to the fewest (“Bottom 20%). The green bars show the number of debt-related suspensions in each ZIP Code group. For example, there are over 230,000 debt-related suspensions in the Cuyahoga County ZIP Codes with the greatest number of 211 Basic Needs calls.

Think back to meeting your own basic needs over the last 30 days. Did you drive to work? Did you drive to go to church? Drive to purchase food or other necessities? Drive yourself or a family member to the doctor? To volunteer, visit with friends, or go out to dinner? How different would those 30 days have been if your driver’s license were suspended because of your bank account balance? Easing this unnecessary transportation burden, a burden unrelated to dangerous driving, would be a meaningful step in helping these households meet their basic needs.

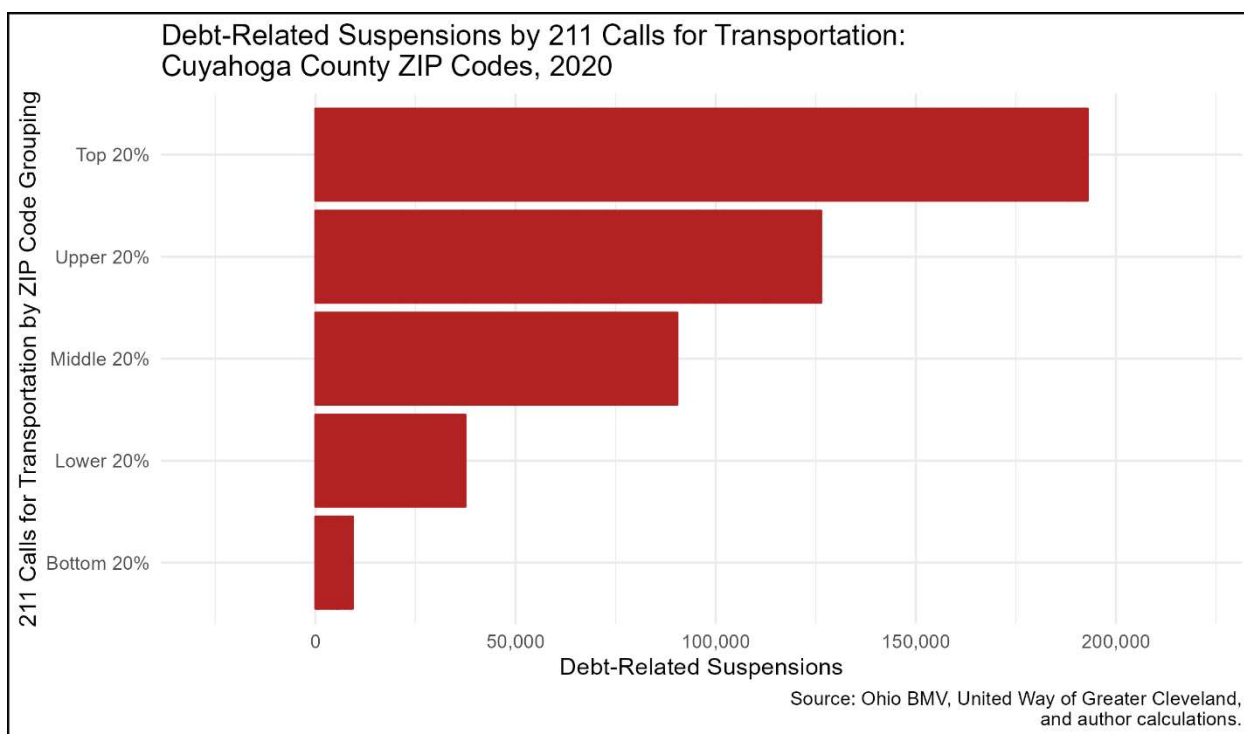


Finding 2:

SB 37 would make a major impact on those who are struggling to meet their transportation needs.

The graph below shows five groups of Cuyahoga County ZIP Codes, ranked from the highest number of Transportation calls to 211 (Top 20%) to the fewest (“Bottom 20%). The red bars show the number of debt-related suspensions in each ZIP Code group. For example, there are over 190,000 debt-related suspensions in the Cuyahoga County ZIP Codes with the greatest number of 211 Transportation calls.

This unnecessary transportation burden is directly evident – ZIP Codes with the most calls for Transportation help are the same ZIP Codes with the most debt-based driver’s license suspensions. It is difficult to meet your transportation needs in Cuyahoga County with a suspended driver’s license.

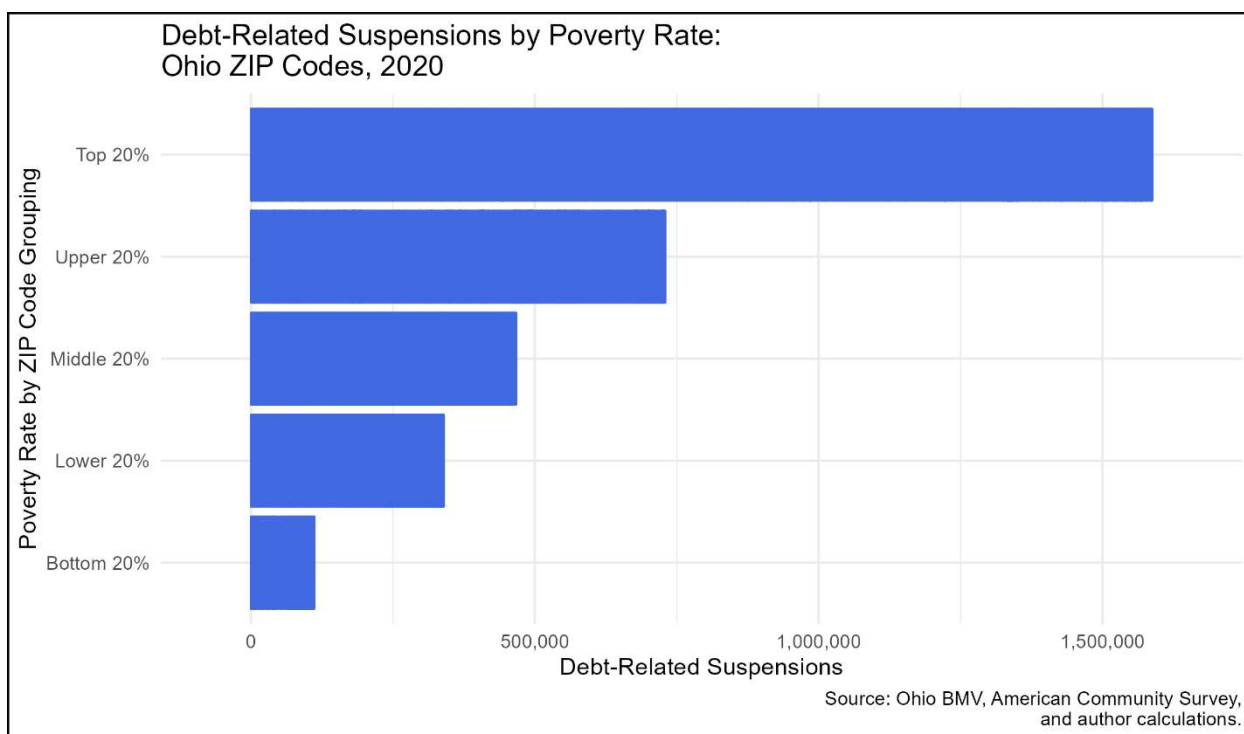


Finding 3:

Statewide, SB 37 would provide relief in Ohio's highest poverty ZIP Codes.

The graph below shows five groups of Ohio ZIP Codes, ranked from the highest poverty rate (Top 20%) to the lowest poverty rate ("Bottom 20%). The blue bars show the number of debt-related suspensions in each ZIP Code group in 2020 (our most recent year of data). For example, there are the most debt-related suspensions, nearly 1.6 million of them, in Ohio's highest poverty ZIP Codes. There are the fewest suspensions, less than 115,000, in Ohio's lowest poverty ZIP Codes.

Clearly, these suspensions are disproportionately represented in Ohio's poorest communities. Is it reasonable to expect Ohio's highest poverty communities to thrive while shouldering the heaviest burden of license suspensions that are unrelated to dangerous driving?

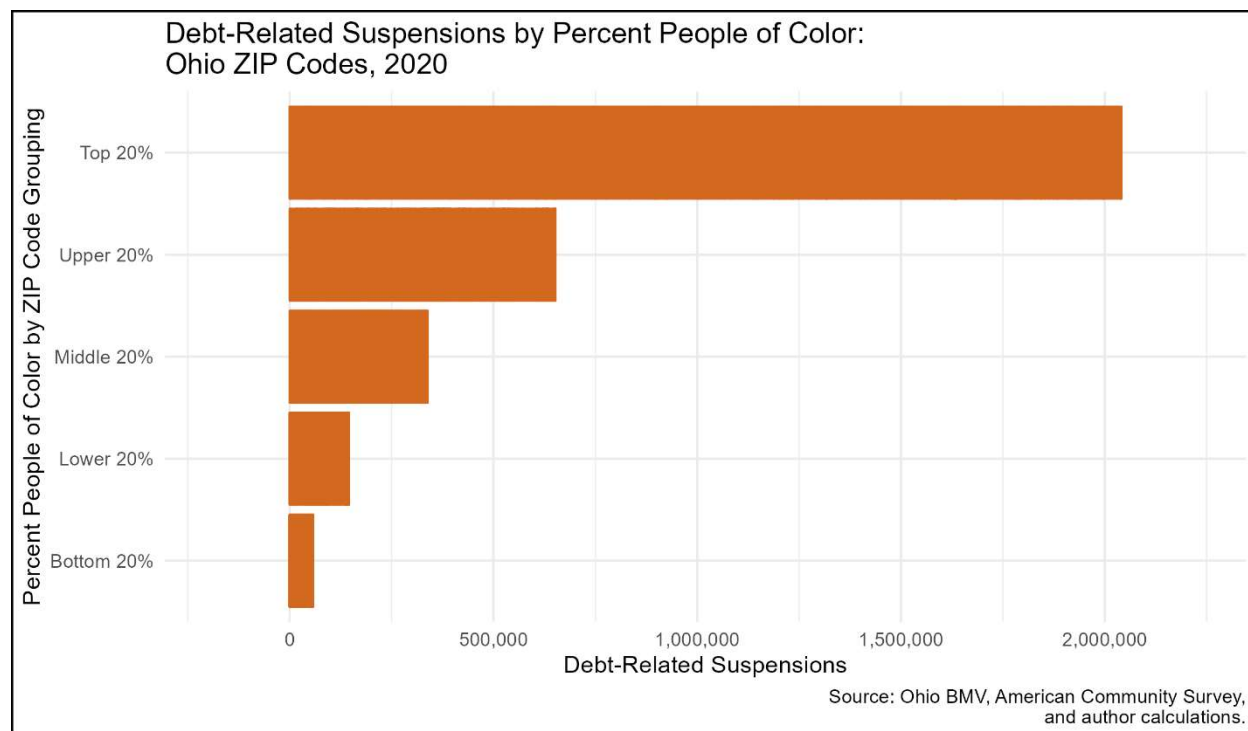


Finding 4:

Statewide, SB 37 would provide relief in Ohio's most diverse ZIP Codes.

The graph below shows five groups of Ohio ZIP Codes, ranked from the highest percent People of Color (Top 20%) to the lowest ("Bottom 20%). The orange bars show the number of debt-related suspensions in each ZIP Code group in 2020 (our most recent year of data). For example, there are more than 2 million debt-related suspensions in Ohio's highest percent People of Color ZIP Codes. There are the fewest debt-related suspensions, fewer than 60,000, in Ohio's Whitest ZIP Codes.

These suspensions are disproportionately represented in the state's most diverse communities. Given the history and legacy of government's role in housing discrimination, how can the state not take the opportunity to correct the practice of suspending an individual's driver's license for reasons of debt, not dangerous driving, given the overwhelming racial imbalance?



In summary, debt-related driver's license suspensions are concentrated in communities that have the most trouble meeting their **basic needs** in general, and their **transportation needs** in particular. They are disproportionately located in **high poverty communities** and **communities of color**. Passing SB 37 would ease this mobility burden, giving back to impacted households a critical tool, a necessary and foundational tool, to reengage in their communities and regional economies.