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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 37

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Ohio Poverty Law Center
House Homeland Security Committee
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Chair Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the House Homeland Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 37. My name is Zack Eckles, and I am an attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC). Our mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

Senate Bill 37 is a substantial step towards ending the counterproductive practice of suspending driver's licenses to collect debt. **According to the Legal Aid Society's Road to Nowhere Report, there were 258,730 Ohio drivers in 2020 who were not able to drive legally due to a license forfeiture suspension.** Enacting S.B. 37 and eliminating driver's license suspensions for failure to pay court fines and fees will get many of those drivers on the road legally again.

We can do this, and S.B. 37 does, without sacrificing the courts' ability to collect fines and fees or absolving these drivers of the debts they owe. **For both court fees and fines, courts can set up payment plans, send the debts to a collection agency, order community service in lieu of payment, or execute a civil judgment through any means available in RC 2929.28 (property liens, wage garnishment, etc.).** S.B. 37 does not reduce current fines or fees, nor does it forgive any existing debts. It would simply remove the counterproductive practice of suspending a person's driver's license to collect court fines and fees.

Most of the attention S.B. 37 has received has been for eliminating suspensions for drug possession or for failure to pay court fines and fees, and rightfully so. I want to quickly mention some of the lesser discussed positive changes.

- Removes driver's license suspensions for truancy.
- It retains driver's license suspensions for driving without insurance but eliminates the suspension of motor vehicle registration rights and impoundment of a motor vehicle's certificate of registration and license plates as penalties so single car families can still get where they need to go.
- Reduces the amount of time from either three or five years down to one year that a person whose license was suspended for driving without insurance must maintain an SR-22 Certificate.
- Could automatically reinstate up to 43,630 licenses suspended from the discontinued Random Selection Verification Program.

This legislation will improve the lives of countless low-income Ohioans without appropriating a single dollar simply by lowering barriers the state has raised too high. Please support Senate Bill 37.

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