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Testimony in Support of Sub. SB 37

Regina Campbell, Attorney

**Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati
House Homeland Security Committee**

December 11, 2024

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 Sub Senate Bill 37. My name is Regina Campbell, and I am an attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati. Our mission is to resolve serious legal problems of low-income people, to promote economic and family stability, and to reduce poverty through effective legal assistance.

At Legal Aid, I am the Managing Attorney of the practice group entitled Income, Work and Health. As part of that practice group, I manage a long-standing project called Clearing Legal Hurdles to Employment (CLH). In CLH, we partner with social service agencies in our 7-county service area that are helping people get and keep employment. While the agencies help participants with resumes, interviews, employment skills and job coaching, we help with any legal barriers that can disrupt stability and make it more difficult for people to get and keep employment. We also provide assistance to clients who contact us on their own, with legal issues that can disrupt their financial/employment stability.

On a regular basis, I provide advice and information to clients who have suspended licenses. As I have stated in previous testimony, the suspensions that I see most frequently are Forfeiture suspensions. The BMV imposes this type of suspension when a court notifies it that a licensed individual has not paid a court-ordered fine in a traffic matter. Although some of these fines can be relatively small, most courts apply payments first to court costs, and then to fines. This means that a person with a \$50 fine but \$200 in court costs generally must pay the full \$250 before they have paid off their fine. Ohio law does not allow any driving privileges on a Forfeiture suspension. Thus, the licensed individual has no legal ability to drive under this suspension.

Eliminating the Forfeiture suspension will mean more stability in low-income lives. Many of my clients simply cannot pay their outstanding fines/court costs all at once. Most have to make payments when they have the ability. Many are working single parents who have very little, if any, extra funds left over at the end of the month.

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Their car and their license are often their most important possessions. Without them, it is extremely difficult to maintain employment.

I had a client last month who contacted us about her suspended driver's license. She had a Forfeiture suspension and a Non-compliance suspension for failure to show state minimum insurance. She had secured the required SR22 insurance for her Non-compliance suspension but could not afford to pay her court fine/costs. Her car registration had expired, but with her license suspended, she could not re-register her car. Her landlord had notified her that she could not park a car with expired tags in her apartment complex's parking lot. If she didn't move it, it would be towed. She knew that if her car was towed, she would lose her car forever because she would not be able to pay the impound fees.

Higher income people simply do not face this situation or this particular stress. If they get a ticket, they can either afford to pay it off quickly, or even hire an attorney to help them fight the ticket. They do not risk losing their car and their employment because they cannot afford to pay a speeding ticket. SB 37 evens the playing field by requiring everyone to pay their traffic fines, but not punishing low-income Ohioans by taking away their license.

Similarly, reducing the Non-compliance suspension for failure to carry state minimum insurance will help low-income Ohioans. Carrying SR22 bond insurance is expensive; it is an expense most low-income people struggle to afford. Requiring this extra insurance for a year, rather than three or five, is a much more reasonable expectation.

Finally, allowing child support obligors to apply for driving privileges in all circumstances, and not just during contempt proceedings is another change that will allow low-income Ohioans to better maintain employment. This change allows obligors to be more proactive and petition the court for privilege so they can obtain/maintain employment and pay their child support obligations before a finding of contempt. Everyone has the same goal – that obligors regularly pay their ordered support. However, taking away an obligor's driver's licenses does not promote this goal, as it makes it much harder to maintain employment.

I urge you to support Sub Senate Bill 37. I thank Senator Ingram for my invitation to provide testimony on this most important bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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