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**Testimony in Support of SB 37**  
**Zack Eckles, Attorney**  
**Ohio Poverty Law Center**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**February 22, 2022**

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Judiciary 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 at 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.

Ohioans with a valid driver's license may take for granted the access it gives them to work, family, health care, and education. Eighty-two percent of Ohio workers drive themselves to work.<sup>1</sup> A working vehicle and valid driver's license are essential to live a free and prosperous life in the State of Ohio, *especially* if you live in a rural community.

Unfortunately, under Ohio law, an individual's inability to pay a fine or fee can result in their driver's license being suspended. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's 2022 Road to Nowhere Report<sup>2</sup> found that Ohio drivers face over 3 million debt-related suspensions annually, and that from 2016-2020 there was an average outstanding total debt each year of over \$920 million. In 2020 alone there were 1,133,810 Ohio drivers with debt-related suspensions.

Most fines, fees, and other costs from debt-related suspensions go unpaid. These unpaid amounts roll over from year to year as outstanding debt that is still owed. From 2016 through 2020, the Ohio BMV and other creditors assessed \$758 million in fees and other claims for debt-related suspensions, but, during the same 5-year period only \$167 million (22%) was paid. Taking away a person's ability to drive is not an effective way to collect debt.

Senate Bill 37 takes some good, but small steps to address debt-related suspensions. For example, reducing the driving without insurance look back period for repeat offenses from 5 years to 1 year, will enable more otherwise qualified drivers to stay on the road. So, while we are grateful to Senators Blessing and Ingram for recognizing the need and introducing Senate Bill 37, we hope that it is a starting point for more comprehensive legislation to end debt-related driver's license suspensions in Ohio.

Poverty should never determine who is and who is not free to drive. Thank you for your time and attention, I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, B08301: Means of Transportation to Work in Ohio (2020: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables), available at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ohio%20means%20of%20transportation%20to%20work&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B08301> (last visited July 15, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> <https://lasclv.org/roadtonowherereport/>