

Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

December 11, 2023

Written Proponent Testimony – SB 37

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 37. I also want to thank Senators Blessing and Ingram for introducing this important legislation to refine the use of driver's license suspension here in Ohio.

I am presenting written testimony on behalf of Prison Fellowship, the nation's largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and a leading advocate for values-based criminal justice reform. Established on the belief that all people are created in God's image and that no life is beyond His reach, Prison Fellowship takes a restorative approach to all those affected by crime and incarceration.

Crime demands accountability, and punishment for crime should be proportional. The issue of proportionality, whether the penalty "fits" the crime, is salient to today's conversation. While there is certainly a role for license suspension in driving related cases with meaningful safety concerns, license suspensions are too often imposed in cases entirely unrelated to unsafe driving. These suspensions limit a person's ability to maintain gainful employment, care for their families, report to supervision check ins, and pay off court debt—especially in rural counties without robust public transportation.¹ And, when license suspension is overused, prosecutors, officers, and courts are forced to divert limited resources from critical public safety threats to responding to those who drive on a suspended license.²

Access to transportation, to work and community supports, is essential for many men and women seeking to leave crime and incarceration behind. SB 37 would address the overuse of driver's license suspensions by limiting driver's license suspension for offenses not related to unsafe driving or failure to pay court fines. However, the bill will permit suspension of a driver's license to be used as a tool to maintain safety on the road.

As we hold people accountable, it's very important to think critically about whether the penalty fits the crime. SB 37 takes a meaningful step in that direction and gives Ohioans a grace period to show proof of financial responsibility before a license is suspended. When people can drive legally and safely, they are able to take care of their families, hold a job, and be a contributing member of the community.

Thank you for your time and I hope you will consider supporting SB 37.

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¹ Letter from Americans for Prosperity et al., to Senator Charles Schumer, Senator Mitch McConnell, Senator Richard Durbin, and Senator John Thune (March 25, 2021), https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/content/uploads/2021/03/Driving-for-Opportunity-Act_Letter-of-Support_2021-1.pdf.

² Letter from Patrick Yoes, National President, National Fraternal Order of Police to Senator Christopher Coons and Senator Roger F. Wicker (March 26, 2021), <https://fop.net/letter/s-998-driving-for-opportunity/>.