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

We are attorneys with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (“ABLE”). ABLE is a non-profit law firm that represents, assists, and advocates for low-income clients and groups.

We submit this testimony in support of SB 37 on behalf of our clients.

Access to transportation, and conversely the loss of transportation, can be life-altering. Eighty-six percent of Americans drive to work. Many employers require workers to have a valid, unencumbered driver’s license. Being able to travel affects one’s ability to find security. From food stability to financial stability. This is especially true for our low-income client base. We testify today about how the current laws and policies around driver’s license suspensions impact our client base and why we support the passage of SB 37.

**How the Current Laws and Policies Impact our Client Base.**

Picture two Ohioans who have fines for the same driving violations. One has money and the other does not. Under the current laws and policies, the Ohioan with money can pay those fines and continue driving; the Ohioan without money cannot drive until they pay off those fines. This includes driving to work to earn money. If the Ohioan without money risks driving on a suspended license, they are at risk of being penalized further and falling deeper in debt.

Because of Ohio’s landscape, transportation by automobile is the most efficient and sensible way to travel. Because of this, drivers with suspended licenses will often take the risk mentioned above and continue to drive. They are penalized further as they compile new suspensions for driving without a license. They fall deeper in debt as the fees pile on.

The current policies create an Ohio where people drive without insurance. It creates an Ohio where people with suspended licenses continue to owe fees that they will never be able to pay. It creates an Ohio where BMV employees, Judges, and legal staff devote an immense amount of time, energy, and resources to find a way to get more licensed drivers on the road.

Currently, there are 69 ways for an Ohioan to have their driver’s license suspended. This unjust structure does not keep the roads any safer, nor does it promote the well-being of over 1.5 million Ohioans who are at or below the Federal Poverty Level. Instead, it promotes poverty and inaccessibility.

We have hosted three driver’s license clinics over the last year and have assisted over 300 Ohioans. The clinics offer wrap-around services, and we commonly hear about the hopelessness that the fees cause people to feel. Many of the people we serve are one event from homelessness. Though some people are ambitious and want to pay the

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fees, they are spending the little money they have on necessities, like auto repair, fuel, clothing, and medical expenses.

While we are proud to have assisted over 300 Ohioans in regaining their license, we wish that the policies that created this need in the communities we serve would change. And we are hopeful that SB 37 will be a part of that change.

**We Support the Passage of SB 37.**

This is why the passage of SB 37 is so vital. It will better reflect the interests of the people and lead to a more just structure that increases transportation accessibility. The more licensed drivers we have, the more insured drivers we have, the more workers we have, and the better quality of life we have for all our citizens. We thank you for your consideration, and we are genuinely excited about this change.

Sincerely,

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