



Senator Sandra Williams
21st Ohio Senate District

Committees:

- Public Utilities – Ranking Member
- Ways and Means – Ranking Member
- Energy and Natural Resources
- Insurance and Financial Institutions
- Finance Subcommittee on Higher Ed - Vice Chair

Senate Bill 160 Sponsor Testimony
Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee
September 12, 2017

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 160.

Senate Bill 160 would allow a court to authorize completion of a community service program as an alternative means of paying driver's license reinstatement fees when the court determines that an offender cannot reasonably pay the fees. This bill will create another avenue through which citizens can restore their suspended licenses and give compensation to the state.

This bill comes at the request of municipal court judges in the state of Ohio who recommend a community service alternative. According to the Council of State Governments, nearly one million Ohioans possess a suspended driver's license each year. Included in this group are offenders driving without a valid driver's license because of the inability to afford the cost of reinstatement fees. Determined by the Ohio State Highway Patrol, there have been 28,675 Driving Under Suspension citations and arrests so far this year. This number has already surpassed last year's total amount of DUS citations and arrests, which was 26,153.

According to Cleveland Police Department statistics, driving under suspension is the number one misdemeanor in Cleveland. At the same time, there has been an outpouring of requests from citizens who want to perform community service work in order to pay off their reinstatement fees and become legal drivers. Senate Bill 160 is a response to this substantial demand and will cut down on the amount of drivers without valid licenses, while still making sure offenders compensate the state.

Community service is a mutually beneficial system for the state and the courts working with hundreds of local charitable and governmental agencies. Community service programs like the Court Community Service have benefitted Ohio communities for decades and are designed to manage an efficient system of quality alternative sentencing that is responsive to the needs of the courts and community. The process for carrying out community service in lieu of payment would require an offender to complete a community service application and file it with the court. In order to qualify for the alternative option, drivers would need to demonstrate financial need or unemployment and be able to perform the requirements of their community service.

Three states, Vermont, California, and Michigan have adopted similar legislation. Specifically, Michigan allows some citizens to perform community service to waive fees for certain driving violations. After a successful driver restoration program, Vermont implemented legislation

statewide that also allows eligible participants to provide community service in exchange for a reduction in fines based on their financial situation. A report by Back on the Road California found that suspended licenses disproportionately affect the state's poor and minority groups which pushed California lawmakers to introduce legislation to reduce economic barriers of license suspensions. These legislative changes represent the new approach states are taking to suspended licenses that works to keep offenders accountable and give them a chance to make amends without ending up in a cycle of unpaid fees.

Chairman Uecker and member of the committee, this concludes my testimony and I will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.