

February 4, 2020

Senator William Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB 234 Vehicle Laws – Suspension of Driver’s License or Registration – Unpaid Citations or Judgments

Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

My name is Danielle Gatling.

I am a single mother and primary caregiver of three children, with a fourth on the way; a full-time college student and Charles County, Maryland resident. I am an example of why Senate Bill 234 is needed.

Unfortunately, the last few months have been rather difficult, as I’ve had to choose between paying my auto-insurance, or living, feeding and providing for my three children and myself. As I’m sure most would do in my situation, I chose to provide for my family, and let my auto-insurance lapse.

While I was saving up the funds to pay the registration fee, as well as stay financially afloat for my family, I was pulled over near my home for driving on the highway with a suspended registration. This led to my driver’s license being suspended for simply not having the funds to pay the registration cost. I only recently managed to pay the \$150 to get my license unsuspended. However, I still lack the necessary funding to pay the fine associated with my insurance lapse – and that fine has been growing by \$7 per day since August.

As I mentioned, I am the mother of three children, one of whom is enrolled in the Head Start program, and another whom is very young and needs to be transported to doctors’ appointments. In addition, with the help of regular visits and trips to the Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, I am overcoming an at-risk pregnancy with my fourth child. Having no license due to a failure to pay my registration fee is simply not an option for myself, my children, and frankly, places us in a dangerous position. My vehicle and driving privilege are a vital necessity for my family.

I’ve felt backed into such a corner with these fines and fees. My desire is to pay these fines back, but incrementally, with the help of a payment plan, so as to not leave my family with no money to handle other basic needs such as driving my child to Head Start, going to the grocery store, and driving to my prenatal appointments. As of right now, this plan is likely not an option because I cannot afford an attorney to represent me in court for these charges.

As written, Senate Bill 234 would give myself, and many others in a similar position facing the difficult choice between paying for a driver's license suspension or providing for our families, a chance to improve our situations without the worry of financially devastating our families simply to pay off fines and fees. I am a faithful believer in Jesus Christ, and I believe that God is working not just on my behalf, but on behalf of the many others that I wasn't even aware are going through the same hardships.

I humbly ask this Committee to pass this much-needed legislation for the thousands of Marylanders suffering under the fee-based license suspension system.