



Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF House Bill 29:

Vehicle Laws – Failure to Pay Video Toll – Penalties

TO: Hon. Kumar P. Barve, Chair, and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Caleb Jasso, Policy Advocate

DATE: March 3, 2022

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support **House Bill 29** because the practice of suspending the registration of a motor vehicle because the registered owner of the vehicle incurred a toll violation and failed to pay the toll and any associated civil penalties, contributes to the criminalization of poverty.

Current law allows for the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), to suspend the vehicle registration of a driver if they have incurred a toll violation and have been notified by Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) that a registered driver has both been served a citation and failed to submit payment, and or, has either failed to contest liability for the charge, failed to appear for trial, or was found to be responsible for the violation and failed to pay the penalty and associated costs. The practice of suspending a vehicle registration for the purposes of collecting debt is an ineffective means of collection as demonstrated by the majority of states that no longer do so; over 40 states no longer implement this practice.

When a vehicle's registration is suspended for a toll violation, the burden falls primarily on low-income residents who often do not have EZ-Passes and are already struggling to pay the fine. Cashless tolls do not allow drivers to pay the toll fee while driving. Also, many drivers do not have a bank account linked to refill their E-ZPass or the E-ZPass could malfunction. This means they have to pay the toll through a video toll charge, which is sent through the mail. The problem is that some customers are not receiving the charges through the mail. Furthermore, **House Bill 29** does not eliminate MDTA's ability to enforce payment as they still retain other enforcement practices such as suggesting vehicle registration nonrenewal; this has proven to be very effective as MDTA advises that as of April 2021, it has resolved nearly 1.4 million unpaid transactions by issuing suspension warning letters and flagging vehicle registrations, collecting a total of \$31.7 million in unpaid tolls and penalties.

The practice of suspending motor vehicle registration is harmful to drivers in many aspects. It will limit their access to healthcare, education, food, and other resources. This punishment limits a workers' ability to go to work which in turn, limits that individual's ability to pay their fines. For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on **House Bill 29**.

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

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