



## Policy Foundation of Maryland

**Committee:** Judicial Proceedings

**Testimony on:** SB0884 - [Driver's Licenses - Suspension for Child Support Arrearages - Exception](#)

**SPONSOR:** Sen Watson, Sen Smith

**Organization:** Policy Foundation of Maryland, MD Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Sarahia Benn (Executive Dir.)

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** March 10, 2022

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing testimony today in support of SB0884. Policy Foundation of Maryland is a grassroots organization focused on State and County level legislation and policies that impacts Black, Brown, marginalized, low income communities and veterans affairs. Judicial legislation is of massive importance to these communities particularly due to how impacted these communities have been historically and currently. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

SB0884's purpose is to bring equity into the child support Administration system. This bill establishes an exception when a family income is not greater than 300% of the federal poverty level. Maryland's child support system calculates based on gross projected amounts (may or may not be actual) that can cause burdens to those who are already marginalized. 71% of the roughly 27,000 license suspensions between 2015 - 2020 are Black Marylanders who represent 30% of the population. That means that families, large sectors of communities are being disproportionately negatively impacted by having their license suspended.

Why is it important to have a driver's license in Maryland?

- 50% of Marylanders travel outside of their county for employment according to the Census Bureau
- Maryland's regional economy is based around having mobility because there is a lack of adequate public transit
- 9% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one hour, one way by public transit
- Southern Harford County it takes approximately an hour to get from Edgewood, MD to Harford Community College or Bel Air for employment or college on Link bus system
- Southern Harford there is no public transit to any of the big business facilities for work which means expensive cab & other ride services must be utilized if you are unlicensed or don't have vehicle
- Lack of public transit access for rural to suburban to urban so lower-income communities where there is scarcity of jobs are wholly dependent on sustaining a valid driver's license and vehicle.

Maryland's commute on average per County is relatively high and is approximately a [half hour or more in each county](#). If you want economic sustainability in Maryland it is simple and clear you must have both a valid driver's license and a vehicle otherwise be destitute.

In many households, the hard reality is there is just not enough money to go around. The Highest cause for nonpayment of child support is unstable employment, low earnings, and a lack of having year-round employment. In the current covid pandemic, circumstances clearly have become even more unstable in the economy for the most vulnerable in Maryland. An Abell foundation study found that 90 percent of those noncustodial parents who made no payment and 60 percent making partial payment were incarcerated or did not have year-round employment.

Across Maryland, 50 percent of noncustodial parents in the state child support program caseload were employed in 2017, and 43 percent of these earned minimum wages or less. Some marginalized Marylanders may never be able to pay down child support debts. Then add the lack of mobility to this equation and it may be contributing to a "no way out" or "nothing to lose" set of scenarios for those who are being crushed by these circumstances.

In sum, there is no evidence that suspending driver's licenses improves the collection of child support arrearages for persons making less than 300% of the Federal Poverty level (FPL) or \$39k. The reasoning for many of these burdensome laws has been that Maryland must comply with federal statutes; however in regards to child support enforcement, the best way would be to ensure that all non-custodial parents have the financial standing and ability to comply with the orders they have been obligated to. The reality is eliminating access to employment runs counter to the goal and crushes vulnerable non-custodial parents ability to comply which ensures that the Child Support Enforcement Agency will not be able to collect and in many cases the parents either end up deeper in debt and/or being incarcerated for the very thing they are supposed to be responsible for, leaving these vulnerable communities in a vicious cycle of debt and destroying entire communities at the same time through family separation.

For these reasons, I urge an **FAVORABLE REPORT** on SB0884.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarahia Benn  
(Policy Foundation of Maryland, Maryland Legislative Coalition)

**(Dedicated to Women's History month)**

"I raise up my voice - not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard ... We cannot succeed when half us are held back." —[Malala Yousafzai](#)