

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 0326:

Driver's Licenses - Suspension for Child Support Arrearages - Exception

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee.

FROM: **John Ford, D46**

DATE: February 7, 2023

I, a citizen of Baltimore City, support HOUSE BILL 0326 to repeal the punitive practice of driver's license suspensions for lower-income obligors.

As a workforce development professional, public servant, and rider of the broken transit system of Baltimore City with the privilege of a driver's license and a car, I know how important transportation access is to the working class of this state. Taking away of the means of making a living from someone in debt is a vicious cycle and a modern-day form of debtors' prison.

Mobility is key in Maryland's regional economy. The Census Bureau reported that [almost 50% of Marylanders travel outside their county](#) for employment. This statistic is more pronounced for lower-income communities of color, where there is a scarcity of jobs available by public transit. Only [9% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one hour, one way by public transit](#). Thus for economic sustainability, both a valid driver's license and a vehicle are necessary.

In 2015, NPR reported that 62% of Marylanders who owe child support make less than minimum wage but owe at least \$10,000 in unpaid arrearages. They will never pay this debt, especially when the current law magnifies the issue by crippling their mobility. [Maryland Code Ann., Fam. Law § 10-119](#) states that upon 60 days of nonpayment of child support, an obligor shall have their license or privilege to drive suspended. Beyond this, [Maryland Code Ann., Transportation §16-303](#) states that driving on an invalid license (suspended, canceled, or revoked) in Maryland is a crime punishable by up to (1) one year in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both. As such, child support debt triggers a suspended driver's license, arrest, or hefty fines, further complicating the ability of low-wage workers to secure employment and make payments.

Data suggests that this issue is racialized as well, adversely disrupting the lives of African-Americans. Although Blacks make up 31.1% of Maryland's population, [MDOT data suggests](#) that they made up to 71% of the roughly 27,000 license suspensions between 2015 - 2020. If a disproportionately higher number of black Marylanders lack access to a valid driver's license due to license suspensions and are blocked from participating in a mobile economy, it stands to reason that current state policy is actively preventing them from making payments.

HOUSE BILL 0326 ends the practice of suspending licenses for child support arrears of those making less than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or \$41k annually. No evidence suggests suspending an individual's driver's license improves the collection of arrears in the long run for persons at this income level. Suspending licenses for lower-income obligors runs counter to the stated purpose of increasing compliance in child support payments and engagement with family where appropriate. In fact,

it cripples the primary way the Child Support Enforcement Agency can collect (wage garnishments) by eliminating access to employment needed to pay down arrears.

For these reasons and more, we urge a favorable report on HOUSE BILL 0326.

John Preston Ford

3301 Fleet St., Baltimore, MD 21224