

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 164/ HOUSE BILL 326

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

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

FROM: **Michael Ross**

My name is Michael Ross. I am a resident of **District 46** in Baltimore, and I support(s) SENATE BILL 164/ HOUSE BILL 326 to repeal the punitive practice of driver's license suspensions for lower-income obligors.

In 2009, my daughter was born to me and my then-girlfriend. We stuck it out together to raise our child until 2012, when it was discovered that she had severe mental health issues. Life happens to us all, but where it became painful was that she refused to let me see my daughter even though there was no hearing for custody. She placed me on child support for the sole purpose of securing state assistance which would have been fine if she had informed me of her plan and not led to garnishments in my wages. My license was suspended immediately since I was unaware of the payments, and my wages were garnished. Again, there was no court order or hearing that I was informed of, but before I knew it, I was driving illegally. In 2015, CPS picked up my daughter from her mother, stating that her mental state continued to deteriorate. At this point, I decided enough was enough and fought in court to receive custody of my daughter, which I achieved in October 2015.

I thought that would end the drama, but it did not. My wages continued to be garnished, and my license stayed suspended despite my having full custody of my daughter. My wages and taxes were intercepted through 2019, again, despite having full custody of my daughter. For years, I spoke with the child support administration to sort out my case - showing them that I have full custody of my daughter, but the suspension was never lifted. This put me in danger whenever I stepped outside to take her to the doctor, school, or even to visit her mother since it is illegal to drive on a suspended license.

In 2019, Maryland Legal Aid sorted out my situation and fought the Child Support Administration to have my license suspension lifted and to receive the intercepted taxes. To date, Stacy Bensky of Legal Aid has helped me to secure \$4360 in tax intercepts, 4-5 backed child support payments, and we are still fighting for the rest. Child Support has been brutal - but my biggest concern was the loss of my license and wages. I'm currently a facilities manager at a high-rise building in Baltimore, but we travel often. I can't continue to risk losing access to my license. If I can't drive, then I can't work, and if I can't work, then NO ONE will take care of my daughter.

SENATE BILL 164/ HOUSE BILL 326 is an excellent move to help guys like me to protect our access to employment for what can be a needlessly predatory system. It 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. For these reasons and more, I urge a favorable report on SENATE BILL 164/ HOUSE BILL 326.