

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee &
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 1, 2023

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are working in collaboration with Out for Justice and the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF). I am a resident of District 12. **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 164.**



This bill 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. In our regional economy where almost half of workers drive to jobs in another county, a license suspension can make it impossible for the non-custodial parent to access and keep a job. *Without a job, a non-custodial parent won't have the earnings to actually pay child support.* A license suspension can make it impossible for the non-custodial parent to visit their child, attend school events, or take their child to appointments, reducing the amount of financial and emotional support that the non-custodial parent can provide. This can also negatively impact business owners who are already having difficulty finding employees. Because driving is critical for many low-income workers, some non-custodial parents may continue to drive with a suspended license. This can lead to fines and penalties, which the non-custodial parent may be unable to pay. A driver's license suspension can spiral from unpaid fines to time in jail. It is yet another example of a system that criminalizes poverty.

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.

An in-depth investigation by the Baltimore Sun in 2020 found child support non-payment penalties had a wide-ranging and damaging impact, especially on the poorest neighborhoods. Subsequently, the [Baltimore Sun Editorial Board](#) commented "And by all means: Leave licenses — professional and drivers' — alone. Nothing shows the folly of the system more, or proves the point that punishment has taken on too big a role, than targeting a parent's income earning potential. It's a child support system; supporting children should be the No. 1 goal."

We want Maryland children to grow up with financial and emotional support from caring adults. Punishing low-income workers with driver's license suspension creates yet another burden to maintaining a job and making child support payments. I am encouraging you to **vote in support of SB 164.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Palmisano
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore