



## Testimony in Support of House Bill 326

### Driver's Licenses – Suspension for Child Support Arrearages – Exception

Dear Chair Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation – representing 10,000 healthcare workers in long-term care facilities and hospitals across Maryland. Our union supports HB 326 to end the practice of suspending licenses for child support debt for those earning less than 300% of Federal Poverty Level. We urge the committee to issue a **favorable** report.

1199 SEIU believes in supporting workers, their families, and building healthier communities for all. For low wage workers, a driver's license and a car are vital to their ability to keep a job and ensure consistent income to meet their basic needs. 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. With 60 days of nonpayment of child support, an obligor shall have their license or privilege to drive suspended. This puts low-wage workers in a cycle of poverty when child support debt complicates their ability to get to work and make payments. Data suggest that this issue is racialized as well with [MDOT data](#) suggesting that Black residents make up to 71% of the roughly 27,000 license suspensions between 2015 – 2020.

Many of our members have no “grace period” for tardiness, which leads to them being disciplined if they are only one minute late to work. It is essential that caring for a patient is not stalled due to a worker having their drivers license revoked due to child support debt and having to depend on unreliable transit systems. There is a critical short staffing crisis across the healthcare industry in Maryland. We cannot risk good healthcare workers losing their jobs simply because they can't get to work. Maryland has the longest hospital wait times in the country, making it even more important that hospital workers have what they need to get to work and earn a consistent living.

HB 326 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. 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.

1199 SEIU supports the whole worker and their family by ensuring we are ending practices that criminalize poverty and disproportionately impacts Black workers. For those reasons and more, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 326.

In Unity,

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