



House Committee on Judiciary
Re: HB 2614, Relating to driving privileges

February 21, 2019

Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair Gorsek, Vice-Chair Sprenger, and members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 2614 to end debt-based suspension of driver licenses. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color. We are a coalition of 19 culturally-specific organizations dedicated to cross-cultural, collective action for racial equity.

A driver license makes it possible to get to work, take a child to school, complete a degree, and care for a family member. Debt-based suspension of driver licenses can make it impossible to fulfill these responsibilities, especially in rural parts of our state. We must take action to end this practice and focus on public safety, rather than suspending driver licenses and punishing Oregonians with low incomes.

The practice of debt-based suspension disproportionately impacts people of color. Systemic barriers to economic opportunity mean that many people of color have lower incomes and fewer assets, meaning they are unable to cover these debts. This cycle of court-imposed debt can quickly spiral out of control and have lasting impacts on families, communities, and intergenerational wealth building. Debt-based suspension of licenses only worsens the existing disparities in financial stability and wellbeing experienced by communities of color.

Moreover, the greater frequency of citations for driving offenses, along with increased fine amounts, puts communities of color at greater risk of license suspension for inability to pay. Reports across the country have shown that license suspension for failure to pay or appear is exacerbating the racial bias already present in traffic stops.

Data shows that people of color are more likely to be subjected to traffic stops and in many cases, the fines against them are higher. A report by the *Portland Tribune* in 2017 showed black Oregonians were given higher fines than white Oregonians for traffic violations such as speeding and failure to wear a seatbelt. That same report found that Latino residents are charged at higher rates than white residents for many driving offenses, including broken lights and failure to use lights, improper lane changes, and others.

According to data from the Oregon State Police, citations for driving while suspended specifically show a significant disparate impact. Overall, African Americans are stopped at a rate of 2.5% of total stops, but over 12% of them receive a driving while suspended citation. Stop data of Native Americans shows a similar disparity; they comprise 0.4% of state police stops but over 10% of them receive a driving while suspended citation.





Driver licenses should only be suspended in cases of public safety, not as a tool of debt collection that does great harm to communities of color. We respectfully urge you to vote in favor of this much-needed legislation. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2614 to end debt-based driver license suspension.

Sincerely,

Jenny Lee
Advocacy Director
Coalition of Communities of Color

