

February 25, 2019



Chair Williamson, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 2614 to end debt-based license suspension. My name is Alberto Gallegos and I am a political organizer with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Oregon State Council. SEIU Oregon is composed of SEIU Local 503 and SEIU Local 49, which together represent over 85,000 people who provide valuable services to our local communities and our state; ranging from care providers and non-profit staff to state workers and higher ed personnel. We are the largest union in Oregon, and nationally we are the largest union with 2.1 million members.

During my time with SEIU, first as an External Organizer and now as part of their political team, I have had the fortune and utmost pleasure of working alongside our members. Despite coming from different political and religious ideologies, and each having their own unique cultural and racial backgrounds, we all stand in unity when it pertains to supporting our families and local communities. Unfortunately, 13% of Oregonians deal with the daily struggle to provide that support due to being entrapped in the cycle of poverty. A cycle that is currently being strengthened by punishing those who are financially unable to pay for non-criminal traffic violations.

In Oregon, even the most minor of traffic infractions will be categorized as a violation, which results in a fine. For those already struggling to make ends meet, this fine can be the difference between feeding their family or retaining the ability to drive; adding yet another obstacle that must be overcome. An individual who loses their ability to drive is susceptible to also losing their job, especially for people who work in an industry that requires them to drive; such as the thousands of SEIU members who work as route janitors, home care workers, and DHS social workers (who all need a license to remain in employment). Furthermore, this loss of employment results in the loss of critical revenue, which only exacerbates the dire financial situation that people are already struggling from.

The suspension of a driver's license does much more damage than just financial loss; it limits the resources that people depend on, such as: healthcare facilities, career opportunities, and education. The lack of affordable transit options that several of our communities face only limits people further, especially those located in rural Oregon where the lack of transit access is more severe. A trip to the local grocery store or school, which we take for granted, becomes nearly unmanageable and, at times, insurmountable to people living with this harsh reality. A perfect example of this is our members in rural areas who work as caretakers for the elderly, and one of their main responsibilities in terms of care is to ensure that their clients have groceries available; a fairly simple task that they will be unable to perform without legal access to their vehicles.

Driver license suspensions due to the inability to pay traffic violations disproportionately affects our most vulnerable and marginalized communities. It does nothing to improve public safety, as these violations stem from non-criminal traffic infractions. It does, however, continue to implement an inequitable punishment to those suffering in the cycle of poverty. In order to break this cycle, we must strip away the layers that construct the multi-faceted issue that is poverty. I believe that ending debt-based license suspension is an important step towards achieving this goal. Please stand in unity with our members by supporting House Bill 2614.

On behalf of our members, I want to thank the committee and the sponsors of House Bill 2614 for giving this legislation due consideration in service to your constituencies and all Oregonians.

Thank you,

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