

To: Joint Committee on the First Special Session of 2020
From: Angela Donley, MSW
re: HB 4210, End Debt Based Driver License Suspensions

Good morning Co-Chairs Courtney and Kotek, and members of the committee,

My name is Angela Donley and I am from Portland, Oregon. I'm writing in support of HB 4210. Some of you may know me from my previous work in this building. I am a social worker spending almost a decade doing direct service with your constituents then spending another 5 years in this building working as a legislative staffer. I tell you this because, with all of my experience working for our state government, I am still unable to help my mother navigate our systems to get her license back.

My mother had her license suspended due to one unpaid traffic ticket 25 years ago, and with all of my experience, I am still struggling to help her navigate the process to get it back. Our story is an example of how a license suspension, during an extremely difficult time for my family, led to decades of economic instability, trauma for me as a child, and countless barriers for my mom and our family. The pandemic has created difficult and uncertain circumstances for so many Oregonians--we must end the practice of debt-based license suspensions now so that they don't have to experience what I did.

When I was 9 years old my stepfather had an aneurysm and ended up dying within a few weeks of his stroke. When his stroke happened, in our home, he was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance and my mother followed---distracted---behind him in her car. On her way to the hospital she was pulled over and got a speeding ticket. This was the first ticket she ever had---until then---she had a clean driving record. Within 2 weeks my stepfather had died, the love of my mom's life, the owner of the business my mom worked for and the main provider for my family was gone. This drove my mom into a deep depression and life was a struggle for our family. The last thing on her mind at this time was her speeding ticket. Honestly, I don't even think she could remember she got one. Death and depression are not something you snap back from quickly, and while she dealt with his death, she also had 4 young kids to care for. She had to find a job and provide for our basic needs, get us to school, friends and family houses, after school activities, and provide emotional support for her kids who were struggling with this death, all while dealing with her own heartache.

We soon lost our home and jumped from family members to friends' houses trying to keep afloat. We lived in Bend, which in the 90s was still a small town, with no public transportation. In the winter the snow piled up and it was unwalkable. When you live in a

small town the police know who you are, and they always knew my mom's car and that she had no license. So, she regularly got pulled over, got a ticket, more fines, more time added onto her suspension.

She never got tickets for driving dangerously or disobeying driving laws. The tickets were always driving without a license, the fines always high and most of the time her car was impounded and we were left on the side of the road, day or night, to try and find a ride home.

As a child, I often rode in the car with my mother. I was often subject to dealing with the issues that come with a parent who doesn't have a license. The trauma of having your car impounded and the fear I get when a cop pulls up behind me will never go away. At 35 years old, with a clean driving record, insurance, and a license, I still get sweaty palms and a dry mouth when I see police officers driving. I sometimes can barely function if they are driving behind me. I am not doing anything wrong. This is a response solely based on my trauma experience as a child with a parent who couldn't have a license— solely because she was too poor to pay her fines.

Finally, I want to express how much harder this simple issue made my childhood. I struggled to get to school, I wasn't able to participate in as many activities as other kids. When I turned 15, I had no one to legally teach me to drive. My mom could give me pointers and illegally help me, but what kind of way is that to start your driving career? When I turned 16, I couldn't get my license. My mom didn't have a legal car and she couldn't buy and carry insurance without a valid license.

All these things made life so much more difficult for me. These things all began because of one ticket, at the single worst time in my mom's life, and the lack of a system willing to work with her or assist her in getting this taken care of. I don't condone the fact that my mom continued to drive without a license, but I absolutely understand why she has had to. To this day, she has been unable to get her license. She had an aging mother to take care of and had to decide if she drives my grandma illegally to doctors or if she spends her days finding a different way to the doctors, grocery store, etc. because our town still does not have adequate public transportation. She has been working towards getting her license back for over a year, and it has taken a lawyer, a legislator working on her behalf, advocating to city councils begging them to let her on a payment plan--which they have refused to do-- and yet she still unlicensed with no way insight to get her license back.

I ask that you please consider my story and recognize that mine is one of many. Please vote yes for HB 4210, to help avoid this cycle of poverty and instability for people who are experiencing a difficult time now. People should not be punished for life simply because they are poor.

Thank you for your time,

Angela Donley