



June 23, 2020

Joint Committee on the First Special Session of 2020  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Chair Kotek, Co-Vice Chair Girod, Co-Vice Chair Drazan, and Members of the Committee:

In 2020, after working in partnership for three years, Children First for Oregon (CFFO) and The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon (CTFO) merged to form **Our Children Oregon (OCO)**. OCO's mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We elevate data and the voices of communities to amplify the need and collaboratively develop policy and public investments to improve overall child and family well-being across the state. We continue to convene the Children's Agenda, a partnership of 120 organizations, looking at the holistic needs of children.

As you move into a special session, to address the critical issues facing our state as we respond to COVID-19 and the systemic racism inherent in our systems, we focus our testimony today on **Ending Debt-Based License Suspension which was part of the 2020 Children's Agenda and we believe should be passed during the First Special Session of 2020**. We come to this issue because of the impact on children.

Job stability is important for every individual in a family, but it can be particularly important for the children. The sudden loss in access to use of a car, can lead to the involuntary loss of a job. This effect is more pronounced in rural areas, due to lack of other transit options. When a parent loses their job, there is an underappreciated effect on the job holder's children.

Using data on tens of thousands of households over a decade, researchers discovered that there are adverse educational effects on the child.<sup>1</sup> According to the data, an involuntary job loss results in a 15% increase in the likelihood of a child repeating a grade. The effect increases for those parents with at

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<sup>1</sup> Stevens, Ann Huff & Schaller, Jessamyn, 2011. "Short-run effects of parental job loss on children's academic achievement," *Economics of Education Review*, Elsevier, vol. 30(2), pages 289-299, April.

most a high school education, but is minimal for parents who have completed at least some college. And now more than ever, families need us to do our best to remove every barrier we can, so they can achieve economic stability. With staggering unemployment rates, people are struggling and one unpaid ticket could be the start of decades of economic struggles for a family. A license suspension for nonpayment can last for up to 20 years. We must not allow our current economic and public health crisis to create persistent barriers that keep people in poverty. The inability to pay a traffic fine should not deprive a person the ability to lawfully drive to the hospital, doctor's appointments, or their job.

Data are increasingly showing communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and we also know that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by these debt-based driver license suspensions. In February, Oregon State Police testified about how there is a direct line from these suspensions to the racial disparity seen in the citation data for driving while suspended, specifically for Black Oregonians. Ending this practice is a first step towards stopping the harm caused by an unjust fines and fees system that existed before but that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Children need to live in economically secure families. **A system that relies on debt-based driver license suspensions creates a vicious cycle of increasing debt, keeping people from being able to pay and undermining the stability of families.**

As you consider legislation during this upcoming Special Session, we urge you to be open to what is possible. Let's reimagine the world we want to live in and make it real with each decision we make!

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chris Coughlin  
Legislative Director

Jenifer Wagley  
Executive Director