

June 24, 2020

President Peter Courtney and Speaker Tina Kotek, Co-Chairs  
Joint Committee on the First Special Session of 2020  
Oregon State Legislature

**RE: HB 4210 – Ending Debt-Based Driver License Suspensions**

President Courtney, Speaker Kotek and Committee Members:

Now more than ever, we need to do everything we can to remove barriers to economic stability for low-income individuals. 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 be for up to 20 years. We must not allow our current economic and public health crisis to create lasting 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.

- Many people are driving less in the time of COVID-19, BUT low-income individuals are becoming more reliant on cars. This is not only because of the social distancing concerns related with public transportation, but also because of the need to get to work, and because cars serve as a potential new mode of employment, like providing delivery services for businesses.
- 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-base 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 their 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 is exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Community Action agencies may have to use funds to pay off debts in order to allow a client to obtain a job or housing. This can be costly and reduce funds for other services.
- Some courts have temporarily changed their collections practices, including not suspending licenses, in recognition of the crisis and the dire circumstances low-income Oregonians find themselves in right now. But unfortunately the majority of courts have not changed their practice and some are even being less flexible than before the pandemic started.
- In rural Oregon, license suspension causes a further descent into poverty because there are not expansive alternatives in transportation.

Please consider these facts and the testimony you will hear from Jimmy Jones, Executive Director of Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency. Please vote to support HB 4210.

Sincerely,

*Janet Merrell*  
Janet Merrell,  
Executive Director