



Joint Special Committee on the First Special Session of 2020

June 23, 2020

Re: LC 97/HB 4210, Ending debt-based drivers license suspensions

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

On behalf of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), I am writing to express our strong support to end the suspension of driver licenses based on the inability to pay fines associated with non-criminal traffic violations. With the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, we must take immediate action to remove barriers to economic stability for Oregonians.

APANO works to unite Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across Oregon for social change and racial justice. We believe that all families, regardless of their income or assets, deserve the rights, recognition, and resources they need to thrive, including the ability to drive legally. In light of the pandemic, this ability is even more important than ever, and it's time to remove the barrier of debt-based license suspensions that only make it harder for Oregonians to regain employment, get their kids to childcare, or seek health treatment. With the pandemic, low-income Oregonians are coming to rely on driving, both because many are frontline workers who cannot work remotely, and because of reduced capacity and exposure risk on transit.

While debt-based driver license suspensions harm all Oregonians who cannot afford to pay, the impact falls disproportionately on Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, as well as low-income Oregonians. While the inequities vary across communities, people of color may be stopped more frequently, charged more often, or face higher fines for citations. Racial profiling and bias, especially for Black drivers, is a very real risk. As an organization working for racial justice, APANO believes that we must not only address racial bias in traffic stops, but also limit the impacts of resulting fines and disparate treatment in the legal system. Earlier this year, the Oregon State Police testified 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. These are the same communities who are disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus, as well as the economic fallout from the pandemic.

One unpaid traffic ticket can lead to mounting debt, and the resulting suspension for nonpayment can last up to 20 years. While some courts have temporarily changed their collections practices, others have not, or have become even harsher in their practices.

We respectfully urge you to pass legislation this special session to end suspension of drivers licenses based on debt so that we can ensure access to driving so that no one faces a barrier to meet their basic needs because they cannot afford to pay fines, and that we can begin to limit



the consequences of racial bias in this system. The public health crisis makes it all the more imperative to pass the policy now.

Thank you,

Jenny Lee
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