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From the desk of Chris Gorsek

End Debt-Based Driver License Suspensions

Suspending driver licenses for inability to pay fines keeps people from being able to pay their debts and traps people in a cycle of poverty. The economic instability caused by COVID-19 exacerbates this cycle.

In Oregon, **334,338** suspensions have been issued in the past decade— not for highway safety reasons, but because someone could not pay fines from a traffic ticket, like not using their turn signal or having a headlight out. Suspending a license deprives people of reliable, lawful transportation necessary to get to and from work, keep medical appointments, care for their family or to meet their financial obligations. 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 wasting state resources.

Without a license, people face impossible choices

Access to transportation is a necessary part of being able to live your life in Oregon, especially in rural areas. While some people are driving less during the pandemic, low-income individuals are becoming more reliant on cars. This is because of social distancing concerns related with public transportation, but also because cars serve as a potentially new mode of employment, like providing delivery services for businesses.

Suspending licenses when someone can't pay is ineffective

Data from around the country shows that ending suspensions does not impact revenue. Courts have access to the same collections methods as other institutions and can collect from tax refunds through the Department of Revenue. California ended suspensions with no impact on judicial court collection. OJD's collections data show that license suspension is not effective at inducing payment.

Debt-based suspensions are not related to public safety

Taking a driver license away for not paying a fine or fee does not make our roads safer. Oregon has a mechanism to suspend driver licenses when people have too many violations and it is applied equally to people regardless of if they have money or not. Public safety should not be tied to debt collection.

This crisis is hard enough for Oregonians, we must end the practice of debt-based license suspensions so that people are not falling deeper into poverty during a pandemic simply because they can't afford to pay their traffic tickets immediately.



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