Policy Matters Ohio

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What's next for driver's-license suspension reform?

What leaders accomplished and what's left to do

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Thousands of Ohioans lose their driver's license every year for financial reasons, not dangerous driving. Suspensions related to debt or insurance noncompliance turn a problem (not having enough money) into a crime. In other words, they *criminalize poverty*.

Ohio started to address this issue with HB 29, which was passed in 2025. HB 29 limited the use of driver's license suspensions in some situations, but not all of them. An Ohioan can still lose their license for having too little money — a problem that is only made worse by stripping a person's ability to drive.

License suspensions make it harder to earn income to pay debt

Suspending a driver's license for debt is counterproductive, making it harder for people to pay the money they owe.

According to the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's 2022 Road to Nowhere report, 82% of employed Ohioans drive themselves to work. That means that roughly 82% of Ohioans depend on their driver's license to earn their income.

License suspensions don't just make it harder to pay debt — they often add to that debt directly. For example, many kinds of suspensions require reinstatement fees, which may end up costing more than the original debt. Insurance-related suspensions may require an individual to file and carry an SR-22/bond, an especially expensive insurance policy.

These policies and others like them place an undue burden on people with low-wage jobs, trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Many people have little choice than to drive on a suspended license to

HB 29 left in place the following types of license suspensions and blocks, among others:

Judgement Suspensions *are issued when a person fails to pay for damage they've been found responsible for caused by a motor vehicle.*

Child Support Suspensions *are issued when an individual fails to pay child support.*

Noncompliance Suspensions *are issued when an individual is unable to present proof of insurance at a traffic stop or incident. There is a lookback period with harsher penalties on repeat offenders.*

Security Suspensions *are issued when an individual without insurance causes an accident with more than $400 in damages. (An individual who causes an accident but **does** have insurance is not subject to a Security Suspension.)*

Court Registration Blocks *prevent a vehicle owner from renewing their registration if they have unpaid fines or fees.*

Warrant Blocks*, prevent a person with an outstanding warrant — including one for failure to pay fines and fees — from getting a new driver's license, or renewing a current license or vehicle registration.*

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meet their basic needs and responsibilities, which can lead to additional fines and involvement in the legal system. HB 29 helped push back some of that economic injustice.

What HB 29 got right

In 2017, Ohio had issued roughly three million driver's license suspensions, of which about 60%, or around two million, were not for unsafe driving. In 2025, just one month after HB 29 was enacted, 429,501 suspensions and registration blocks had been removed, along with $8,380,681 in reinstatement fees. The immediate impact was because the bill's provisions were automatic and retroactive, a policy detail championed by Ohio's Drive to Justice Coalition (DTJ) and a group of directly impacted Ohioans called the Neighborhood Drivers, both of which were critical to the bill's passage.

HB 29 ended or amended several types of debt-related suspensions, including license forfeiture suspensions for failure to pay a court fine. It also reinstated all licenses suspended under the random selection noncompliance program, which had been inactive for several years.

Child support suspensions were also narrowed in several ways. Child support enforcement agencies are now required to give 30 days' notice before requesting a license suspension and can consider whether the suspension would prevent the individual from making future child support payments. A person with a suspended driver's license for unpaid child support can now apply for limited driving privileges to allow them to get to work, childcare, and medical appointments.

Additionally, HB 29 removed license suspensions for school truancy and non-vehicle drug-related offenses. The bill also reduced the lookback period for noncompliance suspensions from five years to one year, and the time a driver must carry an SR-22/bond after a security suspension from three or five years to one year.

The work continues

HB 29 made an important difference for thousands of Ohioans, but it did not go as far as it should have. Before HB 29, DTJ and Neighborhood Drivers championed SB 37, which would have ended all license forfeiture suspensions in Ohio.

Some important elements of SB 37 were ultimately added to HB 29, but 27,908 Ohioans still have one license suspension remaining and 111,170 have multiple. Judgement suspensions, security suspensions, and failure to appear suspensions are still commonplace.

These kinds of suspensions primarily impact communities of color. Ohio ZIP codes with the highest percentage of residents of color also face the highest rates of license suspensions and face a high financial burden. Data from 2015-2019 shows that the average cost of debt-related suspensions in communities of color was $12 million dollars.

HB 894 — now in the Ohio House of Representatives — continue the important work of HB 29. Proposed in the House by Rep. Darnell Brewer HB 894 would address insurance-related judgment and security suspensions. If passed, the bill would allow people whose

license was suspended for a variety of reasons to apply for limited driving privileges. It would also change the period within which an individual must file a report that the other driver was uninsured from six months to 90 days after an accident. Additionally, HB 894 seeks to increase the amount required to trigger a security or judgement suspension from $400 to $25,000. This line was added because of input from the Neighborhood Drivers.

The legislature should pass HB 894 and continue working toward the end of all debt-related license suspensions in Ohio.