



WE URGE YOU TO SUPPORT HOUSE BILL 888

House Bill 888-Remove Barriers to Employment from Court Debt

Primary Sponsors: Representatives Saine, Clemmons, Chesser, and John

North Carolina is one of the minority states that automatically suspends a motorist's driver's license for unpaid traffic-related fines and fees or for missing a court date. The license remains suspended until the motorist addresses the failure to pay by paying or otherwise resolving the debt; or handles the failure to appear by having the case re-scheduled with the court or dismissed. Since poverty and debt are common experiences in North Carolina, thousands of people are not able to ever have their license reinstated. Indeed, the average suspension length is approximately 8.5 years.

WHY REFORM IS NEEDED:

- 1 in 7, or more than 1.2 million people, in North Carolina have suspended driver's licenses because of unpaid traffic-related fines and fees or for missed court dates. Of those, 263,000 people have suspensions solely because of unpaid debt and more than 800,000 people have suspensions solely because of failure to appear.
- Since 95% of North Carolina workers drive to work, a suspended driver's license is a significant barrier to meaningful employment. Suspensions also make it harder to obtain affordable housing, attend doctor's appointments, or care for one's family.
- In the last 5 years, twenty-four states - including Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas - have passed reforms to end driver's license suspension for unpaid traffic-related fines and fees or for missed court dates.

MAJOR COMPONENTS OF HOUSE BILL 888:

- Ends the practice of suspending driver's licenses for unpaid fines and fees or for missed court dates.
- Lifts existing driver's license suspensions for unpaid traffic-related fines and fees or for missed court dates, waives all the debt owed for those cases, and reinstates driver's licenses for people with suspensions ONLY for unpaid traffic-related fines and fees or for missed court dates.
- Allocates funding to develop a text message program that will remind defendants about their upcoming court date and payment due date.