



Support SB 1013

Stop Using Driver's License Suspensions like a Debtor's Prison

SB 1013: Sen. Stanley (R-Glade Hill). Assigned to Courts of Justice.

LIS Bill Description: Suspension of driver's license for nonpayment of fines or costs. Repeals the requirement that the driver's license of a person convicted of any violation of the law who fails or refuses to provide for immediate payment of fines or costs be suspended. The bill also removes a provision allowing the court to require a defendant to present a summary prepared by the Department of Motor Vehicles of the other courts in which the defendant also owes fines and costs. The bill requires the Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles to return or reinstate any person's driver's license that was suspended prior to July 1, 2019, solely for nonpayment of fines or costs, provided that such person has paid the applicable reinstatement fee.

Background on Driver's Licenses: In Virginia, if you owe court fines and fees, your driver's license can be suspended unless you get on a payment plan. One in six Virginia drivers (approximately 900,000 people) has had his or her license suspended because of owing court fines and fees. Almost any poor person who has interacted with the criminal justice system owes some court fines and fees. Essentially, by taking away someone's license and the person's ability to find or keep a job, the state denies the person opportunity to escape from poverty (and ever pay back those fines and fees). This policy is a "debtors' prison" approach. There is no evidence that suspending people's licenses actually increases the rate of pay back for fines and fees. This issue should be resolved in a different manner.

The best way for someone to pay off fines or fees owed is to work and earn money. In most parts of Virginia, it is nearly impossible to work without the ability to drive. However, for too long Virginia has taken driving privileges away from workers for failure to pay fines. This issue disproportionately affects low income workers and is unjust. Workers need to be able to drive to earn enough money to pay off their debt. With the ability to drive and earn money, families across the Commonwealth can continue to provide for their families, put food on the table, take their children to school, the doctor, and everywhere else. It is time to stop punishing people for a having a temporary cash shortage. Senator Stanley's commonsense reforms will help bring justice to communities that need it most.

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The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy advocates economic, social, and environmental justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer, and action. VICPP is a non-partisan coalition of more than 700 faith communities working for a more just society.