

Information on Addressing Barriers to Employment for Low-Skilled Workers: Issues with Driver's License Suspensions

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Although driver's license suspensions were originally meant to remove unsafe drivers from the road, their broadened use as a punishment for offenses that are not related to driving has far-reaching consequences. In 1996 Congress passed legislation requiring that states suspend licenses for drivers' failure to pay child support. Since then, state officials have authorized license suspension as a penalty for other non-driving offenses, including failures to pay parking fines. These policies increase the chances that employers, communities, workers, and jobseekers will suffer because of license suspension or revocation for reasons that do not relate to road safety.

While workers may experience lower wages and unemployment as a result of license suspension, employers face the cost of replacing workers and may have fewer hiring options. Low-wage workers are likely to be disproportionately affected by license suspensions, which may also increase the difficulty of filling local job openings with qualified, trained workers. Some employers require a driver's license as a precondition for employment, either because driving is part of the job or as a way to screen applicants. This is particularly true in construction and health care.

Strategies for Addressing License Suspensions as a Barrier to Employment

Employers or community organizations can help by:

- Providing direct services (e.g., case management, legal representation) to employees or potential employees with suspended licenses to help them to navigate the complex reinstatement process.
- Informing employees about state laws and the impact of non-driving suspensions:
 - » Sharing information with drivers about state policies on license suspension and reinstatement.
 - » Developing the public's understanding of and support for the reduction of economic license suspensions.
 - » Providing legal forms requesting reinstatement that use an appeal of license suspensions.
- Advocating for state-level policy changes that are critical to reducing the impact of economic license suspensions, including:
 - » Legislative/statutory changes, such as fine reduction, termination of suspensions for non-payment of non-traffic-related fines.
 - » Judicial action, by informing court officials about the alternatives to fines.

Resources

Legal Services Corporation: www.lsc.gov

- Created by Congress in 1974 to promote equal access to justice, and to provide high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income Americans.
- Gives grants to independent, local programs—a list of local providers is available on the LSC Web site.
- Offers legal referral options for helping employees deal with the loss of a driver's license.

The Unofficial DMV Guide: <http://www.dmv.org/drivers-license.php>

This for-profit Web site aggregates state DMV policies, including when and where to apply for a license and how to replace a lost or stolen license. It also has links to each state's Department of Motor Vehicles Web site.

The Mobility Agenda: www.mobilityagenda.org

Detailed information and advocacy suggestions.

Bibliography

- Cohen, Bob. 2007. "Technology, Community Education, Self Help and Client Empowerment." Available at: www.lri.lsc.gov/pdf/02/020070_cohen.pdf.
- Gustitus, Sandra, Melody Simmons, & Margy Waller. 2008. *Access to Driving and License Suspension Policies for the Twenty-First Century Economy*. Washington, DC: The Mobility Agenda. Available at: www.mobilityagenda.org/home/page/Access-to-Driving-and-License-Suspension-Policies.aspx.
- » This report highlights promising initiatives and provides recommendations for policymakers to reduce the impact of economic license suspensions that are unrelated to driving competency and public safety.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. 2007. "Editorial: The poor take a big hit if a license becomes a club." June 16. Available at: www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=620432. Accessed June 10, 2010.

Waller, Margy, Jennifer Doleac, & Ilsa Flanagan. 2005. *Driver's License Suspension Policies*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Welfare Reform and Beyond Initiative. Available at: www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/license_all_reports.pdf.

- » A review of the license suspension policies in 14 communities determined that failure to pay a fine or appear in court is almost always the main cause of license suspension or revocation. Low-income drivers may be more likely to experience suspension for these reasons.

—*Compiled by Jessie Peed*

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions

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