



May 4, 2021

The Honorable Frank Hornstein, Chair
Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Scott J. Newman, Chair
Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3105
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hornstein, Chair Newman, and Members of the Conference Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Violence free Minnesota, a statewide coalition of 90-member programs working to end relationship abuse. I'm writing to thank you for hearing the **Driver's License Suspension Reform** bill in the House and Senate Transportation Finance and Policy Committees and ask that you include it in the Transportation Conference Committee Report. This provision is from a bipartisan bill authored by Senator Ingebrihtsen (Senate File 432) and Representative Becker-Finn (House File 336) and is included in the House Transportation Omnibus Budget bill.

Driver's License Suspension Reform prohibits the suspension of a driver's license for unpaid traffic tickets and makes licenses currently suspended only for unpaid tickets eligible for reinstatement. According to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, this reform would reduce driver's license suspensions in Minnesota by 144,000 suspensions per year, a 60% reduction.

This policy reform would greatly benefit survivors of domestic violence, and remove needless barriers that can prevent survivors and their families from securing safety and stability. Driver License Suspension Reform was highlighted by VFMN member programs as a top economic justice policy priority affecting survivors, and is included as one of the reforms on our housing and economic justice support agenda.

The importance of Driver's License Reform for survivors becomes clear when you consider the intersecting hurdles that survivors face as a result of the abuse they experience. Survivors often face serious safety concerns, trauma, housing instability, and various other issues stemming

from abuse, which create challenges to navigating systems and can impact daily matters such as the payment of traffic-related fines. Many survivors also experience financial abuse which can derail their ability to pay fines for minor traffic incidents. Using suspension of a drivers license to address unpaid tickets merely punishes a survivor for circumstances related to the abuse they are experiencing and exacerbates their instability.

Once a survivor's license is suspended it can lead to loss of employment, and also increase barriers to a survivor accessing help from providers for basic safety needs such as medical treatment, counseling, safety planning, legal assistance, housing relocation, and childcare. All of these additional hurdles increase risks to survivors and can make it harder for them to de-escalate or escape a violent situation. The negative consequences of driver's license suspension, consequences disproportionately impacting BIPOC survivors, are dangers that can be avoided by passing reforms such as those outlined in HF336/SF432.

This reform does not change driver's license suspensions for dangerous driving violations and does not eliminate personal responsibility. Unpaid traffic tickets are sent to collections, so people are still held accountable for the cost of their ticket. Eliminating driver's license suspensions for unpaid tickets allows people to continue driving legally for work and to take care of their families while they pay off their traffic debt.

In recent years, several states have enacted reforms similar to those proposed in HF 336/SF 432. In 2017, California, Maine, and Mississippi stopped suspending driver's licenses for unpaid traffic tickets. In 2018, Virginia, Tennessee, and Michigan did the same. Adopting Driver License Suspension Reform would align Minnesota with best practices being established around the country.

This bill has bipartisan support in the House and the Senate and is endorsed by the Minnesota State Bar Association, the Minnesota County Attorneys Association, and the State Public Defender.

Thank you for all your hard work on behalf of Minnesotans and for your service on the Transportation Finance and Policy Conference Committee.

Sincerely,

Katie Kramer
Policy Director

Anne Applebaum
Housing & Economic Justice Policy Program Manager

CC: The Honorable Erin Koegel, The Honorable Luke Frederick, The Honorable Steve Elkins, The Honorable John Petersburg, The Honorable John R. Jasinski, The Honorable Jeff R. Howe, The Honorable David J. Osmek, The Honorable Karla Bigham