



**VOICES FOR
RACIAL JUSTICE**
ORGANIZING | ADVOCACY | POLICY

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,

On behalf of Voices for Racial Justice, 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 Ingebrigtsen (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.

In 2020, Voices for Racial Justice partnered with the City of Saint Paul to conduct two community listening sessions on fines and fees, and their impacts on local community members. All participants had experience in the criminal justice system, both directly and indirectly. We had over twenty-five people sign up to participate. We held two sessions over zoom. Participants were asked a total of seven questions.

Here are three quotes from participants in response to these questions: Participant 1 - "How the system is set up, I'm not safe, no one's safe from it; if the smallest thing comes in your life at the wrong time, it could be over (restitution); you gon' be petty and make me pay money that I don't have and threaten me with jail." Participant 2 - "I was in addiction for 15 - 20 years,

I racked up a lot of fines; I'm almost 14 years into recovery, and I haven't got through half of them (fines and fees); they're set up for low-income people - people like me that can't pay and living in the system; my sister is in the system and is paying for restitution, and I'm paying, and I live in government housing; stop sucking the life out of people with low income; start hitting the people who do have money. They wonder why people who don't have money keep trying to take from people who do." Participant 3 - "Where's the human aspect of assessing fines and fees? Are some of these laws and statutes that we pay fines and restitution for even necessary?" People also shared stories of how they had to choose between driving with a suspended license or losing their job.

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, however, 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. These best practices are important components in the effort to eliminate structural and systemic barriers which continue to impact communities of color and indigenous communities disproportionately.

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,

Brett Grant, Research and Policy Director, Voices for Racial Justice

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