



Letter to Illinois Legislature Supporting House Bill 0277, eliminating driver's license suspensions for failure to appear

May 22, 2023

Dear Senate President Harmon and Senate Leadership,

House Bill 0277 (HB0277), eliminating driver's license suspensions for failure to appear in traffic court, was not heard in Senate committee during the 2023 regular session, which we find regrettable. Nevertheless, we are writing to highlight the necessity of this legislation and express our continued support for its passage.

Our CEO Action for Racial Equity (CEOARE) Fellowship unites the talent and resources of more than 100 signatory organizations to advance racial equity through public policy, many of which have a significant presence in Illinois. We are responding to today's most urgent disparities impacting Black Americans nationwide. The Fellowship revolves around four platforms that are vital to advancing equity and well-being: economic empowerment, education and opportunity, healthy communities, and public safety. One of our key priorities is Decriminalizing Poverty, which includes our efforts to end the use of driver's license suspensions as a tool to enforce payment of traffic debt.

On any given day, there are over 100,000 people suspended from driving in Illinois for failure to appear in traffic court.¹ When an individual misses their traffic court date for any reason, their driver's license can be suspended as a direct consequence of a failure to appear. In certain instances, individuals may miss court dates because they are unable to take time away from work or secure reliable transportation to court or did not receive notice of their court date.

Suspending driver's licenses for a failure to appear in court is often an extension of the debt collection process for traffic tickets. To request removal of a failure to appear suspension individuals must appear in court and "resolve the violation," which is often interpreted by courts as paying fines imposed.¹ These policies disproportionately impact people of color as there are more driver's license suspensions in Illinois zip codes with majority Black and brown residents than in majority white zip codes.¹

Driver's license suspensions contribute to a cycle that keeps many Illinoisans caught in a cycle of poverty by limiting future employment opportunities. Many businesses rely on a workforce that is legally able to drive, and in Illinois, 72% of people drive to work.² In a survey of Illinois residents, 52% of people whose driver's licenses were suspended cited losing a job or missing out on a job opportunity as a result of their license suspension.³ Policies providing for driver's license suspensions for a failure to appear in traffic court contribute to disrupted business operations, personnel turnover, and higher recruiting costs for employers.

HB0277 provides Illinois with the opportunity to change policies that have harmed both individuals and businesses. CEOARE is committed to working with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to enact policies that bring equity, transparency, and accountability to our justice





system. We thank you for your continued leadership and support and urge you to advance HB0277 as a legislative priority in future sessions.

Sincerely,

CEO Action for Racial Equity

Citations

1. License to Work. Chicago Jobs Council – Transit Table. Accessed April 2023. <https://www.cjc.net/license-to-work>
 2. "Illinois – Census Bureau Profile," United States Census Bureau (2021), <https://data.census.gov/profile/Illinois?q=0400000US17>.
 3. "Living in Suspension: Consequences of Driver's License Suspension Policies," Chicago Jobs Council (February 2018),
3, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63a0838721aff66b22dd2598/t/63a09851174d8e5a923e0675/1671469137600/Living-in-Suspension_Report-by-CJC.pdf
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