

January 30, 2020

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB275

The Senate on Transportation:

Chair: Senator Mike Peterson

Vice-Chair: Senator Dan Goddard

Ranking Minority Member: Senator Pat Pettey

Senator Elaine Bowers, Senator Kevin Braun, Senator Randall Hardy, Senator Tom Hawk, Senator Richard Hilderbrand, Senator Ty Masterson, Senator John Skubal and Senator Caryn Tyson

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and other distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 275.

My name is Charles Merrifield and I live in Wichita, Kansas. I retired several years ago after 31 years as a professor at Newman University. I wish to write in favor of SB 275.

I want to tell you about a man who is a member of my church. I have found this man to be articulate, intelligent, and reliable. He is 33. When he was 19 or 20 he was living on his own, supporting himself working in a fast food restaurant. With such a job, he was unable to afford a car that was 100% mechanically sound. Also, being a young man, his car insurance rates were extremely high for him. There were intermittent times when he went without insurance. There came a time when a policeman observed a noticeable defect in the unreliable car and it was a time when insurance had lapsed. That stop led to a fine of \$400. The young man had to work to pay the fine and pay \$400 (estimate) to restart his insurance. Not being able to pay for both at once, the fine was not paid which led to his driver's license being suspended.

The young man continued to own the defective car because he could not afford to get a better one. The car continued to attract police stops which continued to gain tickets and fines which the young man kept trying to pay, but insufficiently. He would get his driver's license back then lose it again over nonpayment of fines. In addition, insurance costs made it difficult to keep himself continuously covered which resulted in loss of license.

The absence of a driver's license has had a devastating impact upon the young man. It has made it difficult to maintain a job. It has made it difficult to seek better employment. Several times he has been turned down for higher paying jobs because he lacked a driver's license which means he has remained in low paying jobs. Plus, not having a driver's license has made it difficult to spend time with his children or to be involved in taking them to school or school activities.

Not having a driver's license, yet being required to drive to maintain employment and meet family obligations, means that any time he is stopped by the police he is subject to arrest and a visit to jail. Being arrested and sent to jail resulted in loss of his job which interfered with the ability to pay fines and other expenses. He has attempted to honor the law and use bicycles, friends, taxis, and busses, but Wichita is a city that is difficult without a personal car.

The young man reports that one time he had gathered enough money to pay the fines only to discover that his fines and fees had been sold to a collection agency who then wanted considerably more than the amount that was originally owed which he could not cover.

Senate Bill 275 would allow this man to maintain employment and seek better employment. If passed into law, it would allow him to pay his fines and not be continually at risk of being arrested.