

KANSAS LEGAL SERVICES

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 2193 House Transportation Committee February 11, 2021

Marilyn Harp, Executive Director
Kansas Legal Services, Inc.

Kansas Legal Services has worked on behalf of our low income clients to reduce the burdens that being poor has placed on their lives. One significant burden is traffic fines. Because the law sets a standard fine, without regard to the income of the person being fined, the impact is much greater on a low income person. When a low income person can't fully and promptly pay the fine, they face the further consequence of an immediate driver's license suspension. 71% of driver's license suspensions are for not paying fines and fees assessed by courts. The Department of Revenue reported in November, 2020, 437,005 suspended licenses in Kansas. 22% of the suspensions are in Sedgwick County, with 17% of the state's population. But this is still only a small segment of the total number of suspension. Driving without a valid license results in further fines and reinstatement fees. But not driving leads to job loss and eviction. It is a terrible choice to ask people to make. These aren't people who "just forget" to pay the fines. These are people who live paycheck to paycheck and for whom the additional burden of a debt for traffic fines can be a crushing blow.

The most important part of this bill is that it opens up the restricted license program to persons who have been ticketed and found guilty for driving while suspended. This program is working for many who can now drive to work, school, medical appointments and court ordered activities. But, another group is left out by the current restriction of this conviction. Removing this barrier will significantly improve the program and allow many new people to participate. They will be able to drive to work and support their families.

Kansas Legal Services maintains an interactive interview on our website to allow people to learn more about this program. In 2020, 3,322 people sought this information from the Kansas Legal Services website. During a summer internship in 2020, a law student created videos and hosted live education sessions on this subject. There is a lot of interest in this program, but many people who would benefit cannot participate. This bill would change that.

When the Suspended to Restricted Program was first introduced, the idea was to get people working, so that fines and fees could be paid off. No group needs this opportunity more than the people who have been convicted of driving while suspended. Allow them to have a restricted license, participate in this program and work toward the day when they have no restrictions on their driving privilege. For those who think a "penalty" must be paid, the limitation to driving only to the specified activities is a penalty.

This could be a huge benefit to employers in Kansas as it expands the available workforce. The beneficiaries of this bill will be able to take jobs outside of areas served by buses and at times outside the bus schedule. That means second and third shift work will be open to these workers. This would be good news for employers seeking to fill jobs.

Kansas Legal Services (KLS), a statewide non-profit corporation, is devoted to helping low income Kansans meet their basic needs through the provision of important legal and mediation services. KLS is legal aid in Kansas, providing equal access to justice for the most vulnerable Kansans. KLS served more than 18,500 persons in all 105 counties last year through eleven legal services offices and two mediation offices across the state.



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kansaslegalservices.org