

BONITA L. GOOCH

TO: Members of the House Transportation Committee

FROM: Bonita Gooch

AS: President, Kansas Black Leadership Council
Editor of The Community Voice, Kansas' only African-American owned newspaper

SUBJECT: In support of HB2629

As the leader of two organizations both of which work in support of the issues and concerns of African Americans in Kansas, I celebrated when I heard about the introduction of HB2629 a bill that will amend an onerous policy that disproportionately impacts members of the group I represent.

More than a racially challenging, the mandatory 90-day jail term and the minimum \$1500 fine for habitual offenders is a crime against the poor in our state and African Americans in this state – for reasons not relative to this conversation but need to be addressed – are disproportionately among the poor in this state.

This year, as the Legislature looks seriously at eliminating the sales tax on food, a regressive tax that disproportionately impacts the poor, think similarly about state laws with fines and fees that are equally regressive and have a disproportionate impact on the poor.

For Charles Koch, or even some of you on this board, a \$100 speeding fine is noticed less than a bump in the road. However, for someone who is struggling to stay above a \$100 fine is like a full-head on crash. This is where the tumultuous cycle begins for so many people who wind up on the habitual offender list.

You've heard it all before. Initially, most of them don't pay the fines because it's the difference between keeping the lights on or food on the table. They continue to drive after their license is suspended, because it's the only way they can get to and maintain their job.

When the issue rises to the level of a mandatory 90-day jail term, it's like the stake in their heart. It's something that kills their last hope of maintaining some kind of equilibrium in their life. With no income for 90 days, many of them lose it all.

Certainly a mandatory 90-day jail term is not a solution, it's a death knell.

In no way does this crime of poverty rise to the level of charges it's aligned with: vehicular homicide and failing to take a breathalyzer test???

On behalf of the members of the Kansas Black Leadership Council, which is composed of African-American community leaders, entrepreneurs and professionals from across the state of Kansas and on behalf of the 25,000 readers of the bi-weekly Community Voice, we ask that you vote today to pass HB 2629 out of this committee and onto the House Floor

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