



Debt-Based License Suspension Principles

Across the United States, millions of individuals have had their ability to drive restricted or suspended—not for traffic safety reasons, but for unpaid debts. This practice creates a vicious cycle of increasing debt and lost economic opportunity. Without a valid license, the individual is less able to get or keep a job, attend to family commitments, and meet the basic necessities of life, including medical care, purchasing groceries and clothes, and going to school or church. These consequences make debt repayment more difficult, especially in the large areas of the country that lack adequate public transportation. If the individual continues driving out of necessity, she runs the risk of punishment that may include being jailed.

When we engage in debt-based license suspension, we make our roads *less* safe and our communities *less* prosperous. Even worse, we trap millions in a poverty-punishment cycle that too often ends in jail. Civil Rights Corps is committed to ending this self-defeating and unconstitutional practice. We encourage jurisdictions to reform license suspension, adhering to the following principles.

Statement of Principles

- **Limit License Suspension to Highway Safety-Related Offenses.** Research shows that when jurisdictions suspend or restrict driving authority over unpaid debts, *everyone* is less safe. We divert police and court resources from activities that actually improve road conditions, such as stopping impaired driving or addressing hit-and-runs.

We understand that States may want to keep license suspensions that are based on safety-related point systems. However, States should eliminate license suspensions over court, traffic, or other forms of government debts. Debt-based suspension is counterproductive because it makes debtors *less* able to meet their obligations and increases strain on local police, courts, and other government systems.

- **Create Meaningful Pathways to Debt Repayment.** Even if the government stops debt-based license suspension, the underlying debts will remain. Comprehensive reform should allow low-income individuals to address these debts using “alternative” methods, including income-calibrated settlements and nonmonetary options like volunteering or participating in GED classes.

Policymakers should provide these debt-reduction options to residents, letting them choose what works best for them, and should make sure that the nonmonetary options are offered free of charge. When jurisdictions are setting the cutoffs for these programs, they should ensure that their “ability-to-pay” determinations are comprehensive and uniform across the State.
