

Driving Opportunities: REDUCED POVERTY



Ending driver's license suspension for unpaid traffic tickets and missed court dates in North Carolina is a common-sense reform that cannot wait.

The Opportunity

Nearly 1 million North Carolinians have a suspended driver's license, not because they are unsafe drivers, but because they cannot afford to pay traffic fines and fees or missed a court date. In a rural state such as North Carolina, a driver's license is key for mobility and opportunity. Ending unnecessary license suspensions can help a person gain economic mobility and get out of poverty.

Why It Matters

Driver's Licenses are Essential to Economic Success

- ▶ A driver's license expands access to jobs, longer work hours, and opportunities for advancement.
- ▶ Reliable transportation helps individuals and families achieve economic stability and build wealth over time.
- ▶ Research shows that longer commute times for workers reliant on public transportation can result in thousands of dollars in lost wages each year.
- ▶ Counties with longer average commutes see lower rates of economic mobility for low-income families.

Driver's Licenses Prevent Deeper Poverty

- ▶ Transportation access is one of the strongest predictors of whether a family escapes poverty.
- ▶ Reliable transportation can allow a person to get a better job, and possibly get out of poverty.
- ▶ When individuals can maintain their driver's licenses, they experience more social mobility. This creates more pathways to move out of low-income area.
- ▶ 75% of people whose licenses are suspended continue to drive – because they have to. If caught driving with a suspended license, they face more fines and fees for driving on a suspended license – creating a perpetual cycle of punishment and poverty.

The Evidence-Based Reforms

North Carolina must act to improve opportunity and improve rates of payment and court appearance.

- █ End driver's license suspensions for unpaid traffic debt and missed court dates; and
- █ Replace with evidence-based practices such as court reminders, ability-to-pay assessments, and reasonable payment plans.