

July 26, 2021

Senator Dick Durbin
711 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

[CEO Action for Racial Equity](#) is a Fellowship of over 100 companies that mobilizes a community of business leaders with diverse expertise across multiple industries and geographies to advance public policy in four key areas — healthcare, education, economic empowerment and public safety. Its mission is to identify, develop and promote scalable and sustainable public policies and corporate engagement strategies that will address systemic racism, social injustice and improve societal well-being.

One main issue area for the Fellowship is Decriminalizing Poverty: Fines, Fees and Cash Bail Reform. Debt-based driver's license suspension is a key issue in this space. This license-for-payment disproportionately impacts low income communities and communities of color roughly 50% or more in areas based on studies that have been performed.[1] We are writing to express our support for S. 998, the Driving for Opportunity Act of 2021. We would strongly urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to discharge the bill and have the matter be considered before the full Senate.

As we identify policies that help address the decriminalization of poverty, we are guided by a set of bipartisan principles:

- Poverty should not be criminalized and the inability to pay fines and fees should never be the reason for added punishment.
- The justice system should not disproportionately harm the poor.
- All individuals deserve to be treated justly without bias or prejudice by our legal and law enforcement systems.

The principles outlined above unite us in supporting the passing of the Driving for Opportunity Act of 2021 and will serve as a meaningful way to generate greater equity across our country.

Debt-based driver's license suspensions are harmful, counter-productive to collections and negatively impact business, specifically:

- Suspending driver's licenses for unpaid fines and fees makes it harder to get or maintain a job, impacts earnings and salaries, and creates an endless cycle of hardship.[2]
- The additional costs related to enforcing a license suspension, result in a devastating cycle of poverty and punishment. They waste law enforcement resources and clog our courts.[3]



- The costs of reinstatement, above and beyond the initial fines and fees that caused the suspension, create additional barriers and costs for low-income individuals and those living in poverty. [4]
- Driver's license suspensions create major barriers to employment and access to the types of jobs that can lift individuals out of poverty. Jobs such as construction, manufacturing, security, and trade jobs including electricians and plumbers require a driver's license.[5]
- Within businesses, debt-based license suspensions contribute to employee turnover, absenteeism, and increase recruiting costs.
- Importantly, rural and minority communities are disproportionately harmed due to the lack of public transportation and other mobility limitations.

As a coalition of businesses, we have seen how the cycle of poverty impacts our workforce, our customers, and our communities. Many states have already taken action to end suspension of licenses for unpaid fines and fees, and many others – whether controlled by Democrats or Republicans – are moving in the same direction. However, passing the Driving for Opportunity Act is the momentum our country needs to increase public safety, promote a justice system that is humane, and would save the government and taxpayer money in the long term.

CEO Action for Racial Equity is committed to working with lawmakers across the aisle to enact policies that bring equity, transparency, and accountability to our justice system.

We urge you to build on the consensus for this bill and pass the Driving for Opportunity Act of 2021.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

CEO Action for Racial Equity

CC:

Hon. Chuck Schumer
Hon. Mitch McConnell
Hon. Cory Booker
Hon. Marsha Blackburn
Hon. Christopher A. Coons
Hon. Tom Cotton
Hon. John Cornyn
Hon. Ted Cruz
Hon. Diane Feinstein
Hon. Lindsey Graham
Hon. Joshua D. Hawley

Hon. Mazie Hirono
Hon. John Kennedy
Hon. Amy Klobuchar
Hon. Patrick Leahy
Hon. Michael S. Lee
Hon. Jon Ossoff
Hon. Alex Padilla
Hon. Ben Sasse
Hon. Thom Tillis
Hon. Sheldon Whitehouse
Hon. Roger Wicker



[1] [“Discriminatory Driver’s License Suspension Schemes”](#), American Constitution Society, Danielle Conley, Partner and Co-Chair of the Anti-Discrimination Practice, WilmerHale, Ariel Levinson-Waldman, Founding Director, Tzedek DC, March 19, 2019

[2] New Jersey [MOTOR VEHICLES AFFORDABILITY AND FAIRNESS TASK FORCE](#) report, page xii, 2006

[3] [“Driver’s License Suspension and Fees Unjustly Impact the Poor and Are in Need of Reform”](#), Reason Foundation, Cody Moser, July 6, 2020, [“Why the Senate should pass the Driving for Opportunity Act”](#), Prison Policy Initiative, Jenny London, July 22, 2020

[4] [“What’s the cost to reinstate your Driver’s License”](#), I Drive Safely, January 4, 2021

[5] [“No Driver’s License, No Job”](#), The Atlantic, Alana Semuels, June 15, 2016

