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(Columbus, OH)—The following statement is attributed to Zack Eckles, Policy Advocate with the Ohio Poverty Law Center, in response to today’s introduction of Substitute Senate Bill 37 in the Senate Judiciary Committee:

“In Ohio, one million drivers have their licenses suspended. Approximately 60 percent of all driver’s license suspensions are the result of debt-related and other issues rather than dangerous driving. A person’s ability to pay a fine or a fee should not determine whether they are free to drive.

The introduction of Substitute Senate Bill 37 today eliminates and revises many Ohio policies, removing financial barriers to returning to the road in Ohio. With the passage of this legislation, Ohio would join more than 20 other states that have already moved away from these debt-related penalties.

When a state’s public policy acts as a barrier to a person reaching their full potential, the long-term consequences impact individuals, families, and their communities at large. A valid driver’s license is essential to participating in Ohio’s economy and earning the money necessary to resolve existing debt. The Ohio Poverty Law Center encourages the Senate Judiciary Committee to move forward with passage of Substitute Senate Bill 37 before the end of the year to ensure driver’s license suspensions are limited to those convictions related to dangerous driving.”

Sub. Senate Bill 37, sponsored by Senator Louis Blessing, III (R-Colerain Twp) and Senator Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati) proposes to do the following:

- Limit driver’s license suspensions to those convictions related to dangerous driving.
- Eliminate the government’s authority to revoke, suspend, or refuse to renew a person’s driver’s license for failure to pay court fines and fees and for failure to appear in court when the offense does not carry the possibility of jail or prison time.
- Eliminate judgment suspensions, which currently allow private parties to submit civil judgments to the BMV to suspend a person’s driver’s license until they pay a civil debt.
- Eliminate security suspensions which, along with judgment suspensions, are another way private parties can utilize the BMV and driver’s license suspensions as debt-collection tools.
- Require reinstatement of a driver’s license after it is suspended for failure to provide proof of financial responsibility after the person provides such proof, pays a reduced \$25 reinstatement fee, and pays the \$10 deputy registrar fee.
- Eliminate lingering suspensions from the discontinued random selection non-compliance program. Even though the program was eliminated by the legislature in 2019, many Ohioans still have ongoing suspensions and reinstatement fee debts from it. Sub. Senate Bill 37 would automatically eliminate those suspensions and fees.

- Increase the opportunities available to petition for limited driving privileges for Ohioans who have had their license suspended for default on child support payments, and ensure that if they meet the requirements, limited driving privileges will be granted.

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The Ohio Poverty Law Center's mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working and raising their families in poverty.