

April 13, 2020

The Honorable Paul Gazelka
Senate Majority Leader

The Honorable Susan Kent
Senate Minority Leader



Dear Senator Gazelka, Senator Kent, and members of the COVID-19 Response Working Group,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on the Judiciary portion of today's COVID-19 Response Working Group. The Minnesota Asset Building Coalition (MABC) is a state-wide coalition of 140 nonprofit organizations focused on creating asset-building opportunities and supporting financial stability and independence in low-income communities.

MABC would like to ask this Working Group to consider the immediate reinstatement of driver's licenses suspended for violations unrelated to dangerous driving for the duration of the peacetime emergency, in order to reduce the number of people reliant on public transportation or carpooling during this public health crisis.

If Minnesota chose to temporarily reinstate driver's licenses suspended solely for nonpayment of traffic tickets or driving after suspension, 33,000 licenses could be immediately reinstated.

Our Coalition has advocated for the past few years for reinstatement of driver's licenses for Minnesotans whose license is suspended for a violation unrelated to dangerous driving, because we believe license suspensions should be used for the limited purpose of ensuring safe roads. This issue has become critically urgent during the COVID-19 public health crisis for several reasons.

First, the use of personal vehicles allows for social distancing during essential travel that is impossible when using public transportation or carpooling. We're especially concerned about people who may be sick, possibly asymptomatic, or high-risk for complications, and who are reliant on public transportation due to a suspended driver's license. Normally, public transportation offers many benefits for individuals and communities, but these are not normal times. A [New York Times article](#) from last week highlights the individual and public health risk of public transportation for workers and riders during the COVID-19 pandemic (Goldbaum, Christina. "Forty-One Transit Workers Dead: Crisis Takes Staggering Toll on Subways." *The New York Times*, April 8, 2020.). Minnesota is not New York City, but it's easy to see that maintaining social distancing is a challenge on public transportation, and that the use of personal vehicles reduces the risk of contagion for riders and transit works alike. Minnesota's Metro Transit reduced bus and light rail service by 40% beginning March 25th, which may create more crowded conditions on some of the remaining routes.

Second, the low-income communities disproportionately impacted by payment-related license suspensions have significant overlap with those communities most likely to continue working during the peacetime emergency. People struggling to pay court debt are usually low-income and have little or no savings, and many can't afford to take unpaid leave. Some are Essential Employees and provide the only income for their families. Those who work jobs that can't be done remotely may be continuing to work or will be some of the first to return to work out of financial necessity.

And last, the closure of courts and licensing bureaus has eliminated the typical avenues for license reinstatement, right when the use of personal vehicles to allow for social distancing during essential travel is a critical public health priority.

For these reasons, we hope this Working Group will consider immediate temporary reinstatement of driver's licenses for individuals whose license is suspended for a violation unrelated to dangerous driving. Reinstating these licenses for the duration of the peacetime emergency would reduce the public health risk not only for those 33,000 families, but also for transit workers and non-drivers by allowing those who can safely drive their own vehicle to avoid public transportation during this public health crisis.

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Anna Odegaard
Legislative Advocate
Minnesota Asset Building Coalition
612-532-3723