

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce supports S. 998 / H.R. 2453, the “Driving for Opportunity Act of 2021.” This bipartisan bill would provide grants as incentives to states to move to a system that refrains from suspending, revoking, or refusing to renew driver’s licenses or motor vehicle registrations, for failure to pay a civil or criminal fine or fee. This counter-productive practice contributes to a perpetual cycle of punishment for the inability to pay debt. **Members of Congress who cosponsor this legislation will receive credit for the Leadership component of the Chamber’s “How They Voted” scorecard.**

In over two-thirds of states¹, individuals can lose their driver’s license over unpaid fines or fees. Driver’s license suspensions can have devastating effects that can cost Americans their livelihoods and limit opportunities for businesses and their employees. Approximately 86% of Americans drive to work and many jobs in the United States require a driver’s license.² Without a license, people are unable to take their kids to school, commute to work, shop for groceries, or make it to a doctor’s appointment. For businesses, employees can’t get to work, goods and services can’t be transported, and the workforce talent pool may be limited.

Driver’s license suspensions can also lead to increased unemployment and underemployment. A recent report released by the Motor Vehicles Affordability and Fairness Task Force in New Jersey, states that 42% of the individuals who lost their licenses due to certain non-driving-related offenses lost their jobs as a result, and 45% of those who lost their jobs were unable to find new employment. 88% of the individuals who were able to find another job reported a decrease in income. For businesses, challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled and diverse workforce due to debt-based suspensions could limit productivity and ultimately affect a company’s success.

Across the country, Black drivers are more likely to be stopped than White drivers, and therefore are more likely to get caught driving without a valid license and face more dire consequences.³ According to one study, driver’s license suspension rates can be as much as four times higher in communities of color.⁴ Reforming driver’s license suspension for unpaid fines and fees is one example of how we can work to address inequality in the criminal justice system.

Last year, the Chamber launched the [Equality of Opportunity Initiative](#) to develop real, sustainable solutions to help close race-based opportunity gaps in six areas: education, employment, entrepreneurship, criminal justice, health, and wealth disparities. Systemic inequalities in these six areas perpetuate broader inequalities in our society, hold back individual

¹ <https://www.freetodrive.org/>

² <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-32.pdf>

³ <https://www.freetodrive.org/resources/#page-content>

⁴ <https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/2020/02/18/new-report-finds-new-york-has-severe-racial-disparities-in-traffic-enforcement-and-drivers-license-suspensions/>

and business success, and hinder economic growth. As part of this effort, the Chamber is identifying and encouraging Congress to enact specific legislative solutions that help close race-based opportunity gaps.

We applaud Sens. Roger Wicker and Chris Coons and Reps. Mary Gay Scanlon, Brian Fitzpatrick, Gwen Moore, and Guy Reschenthaler for their work on this important bipartisan bill. We strongly encourage you to cosponsor this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Neil L. Bradley", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Neil L. Bradley