

Testimony in Support of SB100 as Amended

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Senate Transportation Chairman Petersen, Vice-Chair Claeys, Ranking Minority Member Hawks and Committee members.

My name is Ashley Christy and I am urging you to work and pass SB100 as amended.

Most people want to do the right thing. Given the chance, most people will choose to do the right thing. And that's what this bill is aiming for – more opportunities to allow Kansans to do just that.

The numbers are staggering. According to the Kansas Department of Revenue, as of October 2019, 213,055 Kansans had suspended licenses. This makes Kansas the fifth highest in the nation for suspensions. Of those, also according to the Kansas Department of Revenue in 2019, 71%, had suspended licenses because of unpaid fines, court costs, and tickets. That's over 150,000 Kansans, more than the entire population of Topeka.

Penalizing someone who already has an inability to pay by taking away a key to their livelihood—the ability to drive—just exacerbates the problem. Philosophically, it is criminalizing poverty because it is a harsher punishment for those unable to pay, but this bears out statistically as well. Research shows that these policies disproportionately affect Kansans of color and those experiencing poverty, not only because the penalties inflict more damage, but the suspensions are shown to last longer, on average, as well. These policies force people to choose between following the law and providing for their families, a choice no one wants to make. For those who are actively searching for jobs, there are often questions about whether the applicant has a driver's license or dependable transportation. In a time of such economic uncertainty, those who are already struggling don't need another barrier to employment and Kansas certainly doesn't need to add to the pool of unemployed citizens. And this is without factoring in the additional fines that are assessed when a citizen is caught driving on a suspended license.

Allowing drivers to drive legally while they work to pay off their fines, not only helps to keep Kansans employed, it will increase the amount of money that Kansas is able to collect, leading to more revenue. Studies have shown that setting up options that people can afford is a more effective driver of compliance than the higher rates that are often thought of as deterrents. A higher rate of return, better rates of employment, and giving citizens a way to shop, buy groceries, and get their families to doctor's appointments and the like—all of these, they bolster the economy, making this better for all Kansans.

This isn't a plea to allow those with traffic infractions to face no penalty, it is a call to make those penalties more equitable. It is a call to make sure that we aren't causing cascading repercussions that don't fit the infraction. It is a call for you to do the right thing by providing opportunities for our citizens to not have to choose between breaking the law and providing for their families. It is imperative that you work SB100 and pass it as amended.