

ALABAMA NON-VIOLENT OFFENDERS ORGANIZATION
(REMOVING BARRIERS TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRIGHTER FUTURES)



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Dear Lawmaker,

Feb. 3, 2022

My name is Lee Langston. I am executive director of the Alabama Non-Violent Offender Organization based in Huntsville, Ala. I am also part of a coalition that has been working to end debt-based driver's license suspensions in Alabama.

My clients are previously incarcerated non-violent offenders who are trying to get back on their feet and begin turning their life around. We support them by finding jobs, housing, transportation and connecting the services they need to facilitate successful re-entry.

One of the main obstacles to success for my clients is that many of them have drivers' licenses that have been suspended with one of the reasons being unpaid tickets or failure to appear. They are all aware of the need to clear their records and get back on track, but it's very hard for them to find work, get to and from the Day Reporting Center (for those who are on probation or parole), or otherwise live responsibly without licenses.

I am aware of the hardship license program, but unfortunately in my experience, it is not an effective alternative for my clients. In fact, I've been advised by local authorities including lawyers and judges that hardship licenses should be the last resort. I've never been successful in helping anyone apply for nor obtain a hardship license because the process is just so complicated and impractical given the everyday realities of my client's lives. For instance, the application for hardship licenses requires the applicant to provide maps of every place they might be driving. In practice, that's nearly impossible to do. Unexpected circumstances arise, but the hardship program does not account for those situations and my clients are certainly not wanting to put themselves in a position to again violate the law because they had to make a trip to a pharmacy or urgent care center or some other place that wasn't part of their application. Then there's the matter of insurance. The hardship license requires special insurance (SR-22), which is often more costly. That creates another obstacle.

When I think about the hardship license program, it's almost like payday lending – if you jump through certain hoops you get the license (or the loan), but it's a lot more expensive than a conventional license and it comes with higher potential for failure. In my professional opinion, the best thing we can do to help people like my clients move forward successfully is just end the practice of suspending licenses for debt-based reasons.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lee Langston

Interim Executive Director

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