

VERMONT LEGAL AID, INC.

7 COURT STREET- P.O. Box 606
MONTPELIER, VERMONT 05601
(802) 223-6377 (VOICE AND TTY)
FAX (802) 223-7281
(800) 789-4195

OFFICES:

BURLINGTON
RUTLAND
ST. JOHNSBURY

OFFICES:

MONTPELIER
SPRINGFIELD

January 7, 2016

House of Representatives
Judiciary Committee
Hon. Maxine Grad, Chairwoman
Statehouse
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Chairwoman Grad and Members of the Committee,

I write in support of reform of Vermont's traffic fine and license suspension system. Vermont Legal Aid represents thousands of Vermonters in civil matters each year. A major complicating factor for many of our clients is the barrier to transportation. That is a broad category which may include lack of a vehicle, inability to afford repairs, lack of access to public transportation, and specifically relevant to your committee's interest (and the focus of the task force) a suspended driver's license. Specifically, a significant problem for some clients is the inability to pay traffic fines which may then result in a suspended license.

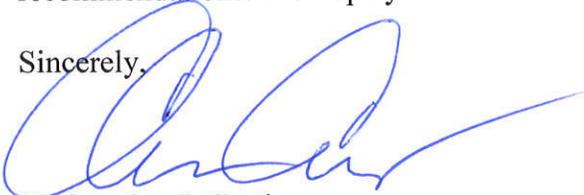
The number of Vermonters with suspended licenses is staggering and represents a growing problem. According to the report, 59,000 Vermonters currently have their licenses suspended. Of those, 34,000 suspended for failure to pay a fine. For low-income Vermonters, the current system with high fines, reinstatement fees, and license suspension penalties for offenses unrelated to traffic safety simply does not work. In fact, it creates a system that punishes Vermonters who cannot pay an initial fine and traps them in a downward spiral resulting in multiple tickets, clogging the courts, and sometimes leading to criminal charges.

Vermont Legal Aid asks for your support in reforming the current system. We urge your committee to consider and pass comprehensive legislation that will:

- 1) Reduce traffic fines for low-income Vermonters;
- 2) Reduce or eliminate the duration of license suspensions for conduct that does not threaten public safety; and
- 3) Limit non-driving offenses for which suspension is a penalty; and
- 4) Eliminate license reinstatement fees.

Thank you for requesting a Task Force to review the Driver's License Suspension system in Vermont. We support the findings and conclusions of the report and many of its recommendations. We hope you will act on the report and its findings this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Curtis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher J. Curtis
Staff Attorney
Vermont Legal Aid