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Court Orders State to Stop Suspending Licenses of People too Poor to Pay Traffic Debt

Hundreds of Thousands of Poor Drivers Eligible for Relief, Reinstatement

Nashville, Tenn. – Yesterday, nearly **300,000** people who had their driver’s licenses suspended because they were too poor to pay traffic debt – the fines, fees, and taxes that arise from traffic violations – won a significant victory when a federal judge granted the Plaintiffs’ motion for preliminary injunction in [Robinson v. Purkey](#). The court ordered Tennessee to halt all suspensions of driver’s licenses for nonpayment of traffic debt, and to reinstate licenses upon request, unless and until it can determine that each individual has the ability to pay. People with suspended licenses should contact the Tennessee Department of Safety to request reinstatement.

The statewide class action lawsuit was brought by [Just City](#), the [National Center for Law and Economic Justice](#), [Civil Rights Corps](#), and the law firm [Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell and Berkowitz](#).

“This is an incredible victory for poor Tennesseans who had their licenses taken away not because they were dangerous drivers, but because they couldn’t pay. With this ruling, people will be able to go to work, see their families and friends, get to the grocery store and the doctor’s office, and do all of the things that many of us take for granted and that give life meaning,” said **Tara Mikkilineni, Attorney at Civil Rights Corps**.

“In most Tennessee communities, a driver’s license is a critical tool for finding and keeping a job, staying healthy, and getting an education. However, at Just City we hear from hundreds of people each year, who have lost their license simply because they could not afford to pay a traffic ticket. For the second time this year, a Federal judge in Tennessee has ruled that this practice is unconstitutional, and perhaps more importantly, these two rulings are part of growing nationwide opposition to the criminalization of poverty. While there are many more to address, this ruling eliminates a significant barrier to opportunity for Tennesseans living in poverty,” said **Josh Spickler, Executive Director of Just City**.

“Momentum is growing across the country to end these unjust and unconstitutional suspensions that serve no purpose but to criminalize poverty. Thanks to this ruling, hundreds of thousands of indigent Tennesseans now have the opportunity to reinstate their driver’s licenses—and more importantly their ability to access jobs, medical care, and the countless important needs of daily life,” said **Claudia Wilner, Senior Attorney at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice**.

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