

Advocates Launch Driven by Justice Coalition To End Discriminatory Practice of Suspending Driver's Licenses for Nonpayment of Traffic Tickets in New York

The Bronx Defenders, Fines & Fees Justice Center, and National Center for Law and Economic Justice Seek End to Practice That Harms Hundreds of Thousands of Low-Income New Yorkers

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New York - A partnership of grassroots, economic justice and civil rights organizations, public defenders, and directly impacted people today announced the launch of the Driven by Justice Coalition to end the discriminatory and predatory practice of suspending a person's driver's license for not paying or answering a traffic ticket in New York State.

Between January 2016 and April 2018, New York issued nearly 1.7 million driver's license suspensions for traffic debt. The widespread use of this policy has [disproportionately impacted](#) poor people and people of color in the state.

The Driven By Justice Coalition is led by the The Bronx Defenders, the Fines & Fees Justice Center (FFJC), the National Center for Law and Economic Justice (NCLEJ). The coalition supports the passage of A07463/S05348, which would achieve three primary goals: ending driver's license suspensions for nonpayment of traffic tickets and for not appearing at traffic hearings; reinstating all driver's licenses suspended for failure to pay or appear; and making affordable payment plans available.

[Hundreds of thousands of low-income New Yorkers](#) who cannot afford to pay tickets face an impossible choice between living without transportation that is crucial to providing for themselves and their families, or risking criminal charges and further debt by continuing to drive. The policy creates a cycle of debt that helps fuel mass incarceration in the state.

Driver's license suspension rates in New York are nearly nine times higher in the ten poorest communities compared to the ten wealthiest. In New York City, communities with the highest percent of people of color receive driver's license suspensions at rates two and a half times as high as communities with the smallest percent of people of color. In the rest of New York State, communities with the highest percent of people of color receive driver's license suspensions at rates four times as high as communities with the smallest percent people of color.

"Driver's license suspension is one of the most egregious examples of the way in which our state criminalizes poverty," said Scott Levy, special counsel to the Criminal Defense Practice at The Bronx Defenders. "We're forcing low-income people - particularly people of color - to choose between living without transportation that is vital to their livelihood or risking a debt spiral and criminal charges. With hundreds of thousands of people losing their licenses every year because of these predatory policies, the time to act is now."

"New York's short-sighted and discriminatory suspension policy prevents low-income people from accessing jobs, health care, education--everything they need to improve their economic circumstances," said Claudia Wilner, Senior Attorney at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice. "We must eliminate this counterproductive barrier to opportunity and restore basic fairness to the traffic debt collection process."

"Driver's license suspension is severe--it should only be used to stop dangerous driving. Not being able to pay or missing a hearing date is not about dangerous driving, it's about poverty. Across the country, the movement for reform has taken off: Mississippi, Idaho, California, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Montana have all stopped suspending licenses for nonpayment. At least six other states are considering doing the same," said Katie Adamides, New York State Director for the Fines and Fees Justice Center. "When it comes to suspending driver's licenses, New York is overdue for reform."

For more information, [click here](#).