

To the House Members,

February 1, 2018

I am writing to you regarding Resolution 76, HB 163 and HB 42: bills that pertain to the suspension of driver's licenses for social non-conformance. If the purpose of suspending a license is to gain compliance, Best Practice and the Motor Vehicle Association, both agree these suspensions do not work. Why then, do we continue the practice? If it is to punish, this punishment is excessive, and therefore cruel. All individuals that have suspended licenses are in a geographic prison. Those that have no bus transportation are fundamentally on house arrest. Those with bus transportation are limited to the bus line, and no farther. We continue their "punishment" long after they have served their time. The argument that this is not a punishment because it is not a criminal sanction but administrative, doesn't hold water. Punishment is punishment, no matter what they want to label it.

My name is Joyce Douglass. Until my retirement in 2015, I worked as a state parole agent in the Pittsburgh District for 25 years. During that time, I saw many barriers to reentry that set people up for failure. In my experience, the 3 main issues that create immense hardships are suspended driver's licenses, housing and employment. Suspended licenses were at the top of my list.

Without a license a parolee's chance of employment is greatly diminished. Even today with so many employers offering second chances, they will not employ without a license. Without a license they have no job, no money for housing, or opportunity to be upwardly mobile in the job or housing market. Many landlords will not rent to those who do not have a license. Pennsylvania is putting large amounts of money into reentry programs, but I saw many fail in the programs because they couldn't get there consistently, or couldn't get to job leads and other assistance they received at the programs. This also caused compliance issues with their parole agents. There were also a plethora of parolees that could not take advantage of these programs because they reside in rural areas that offer no transportation.

I had the opportunity to see the difference in reentrants having a license when they were released, and not having a license. Those with a license consistently fared better than those without one. When I began as an agent in 1990, there were no drug suspensions. I had more success with those convicted of drug offenses, and in general, when they came out with a license. The initial 3 months is a critical time in supervision, and when they can not get out of their old environment, find employment, or suitable housing we lose them. I saw men and women who came home and were not even aware they had a suspension. Many had worked hard garnering skills and making plans for their futures only to find they had no license. I can tell you, that never went well. There is a definite correlation between having a license suspension and recidivism.

It took a while to experience the brunt of license suspensions, and for me, I didn't see large numbers until about 1996 or 97. From that time on, supervising became more difficult. We asked new released to get a job, support their families, get to treatment and mandated visits, and pay FC/R. But, we took away their means to do so. I saw much collateral damage as families fractured do to the stress of having to take on the responsibilities of the parolee. They became another mouth to feed, and body to clothe and transport. One individual I know, Nate, has an elderly father and mother with cancer. He has access to some transportation, but even when that bus can get him where he needs to go, his father must get him to the bus stop 5 miles away. Nate stated he feels horrible about his father having to worry about getting him to where he needs to go, in addition to having to do all the transportation for

his mother's chemo and medical appointments. Adding to Nate's stress is that he is not even able to do the simplest chores for his father, such as grocery shop or pick up medication at the drug store. It is all on his father. Nate also has received his BA from California University but can't find employment: not because employers will not hire him, but because of his transportation issues. We are keeping people on public assistance. We are keeping people poor.

One individual I supervised, who had no idea he had a suspension, came home to find he had a 22-year suspension due to garage burglaries (HB 42) when he was addicted to opiates. I had 2 of his co-defendants. One had a different judge and had no suspension. The other had the same judge and had no suspension. This disparity was one of the many reasons I contacted Rick Saccone and asked for his help to get legislation written to end these practices. These suspensions are arbitrary and capricious.

These suspensions put agents in a difficult situation. If the parolee is doing all that is asked, and not violating, except to drive to work, what do they do? I realize it is a violation, but faced with driving or not having the rent, statistics say 75% will drive. As agents, we don't want them violating the law, but we don't want to take away a job that is so hard to find, thereby putting their residence, and/or family in jeopardy.

I spent many hours, compiling police reports and citations, writing arrest reports, staffing the case with my supervisor and having the individual in for a conference when they received a citation for driving without a license. These suspensions took up a lot of time for us, the police, and the court system. The state of Washington estimated that in 2015, their state troopers spent 70,848 hours dealing with suspensions for non-driving offenses.

Historically, those that lose most are urban black and Latino populations. For them a license is the key to unlocking the job market.

I hope this information is helpful. Thank you for your consideration regarding these necessary changes.

Joyce Douglass

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