

August 4, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chair
Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Carper
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works
513 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for Driving for Opportunity Act of 2020

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

As State Attorneys General, we play central roles in the administration of an effective criminal justice system within our states. We write today in support of the Driving for Opportunity Act, introduced by Senators Wicker and Coons, for its innovative approach to ending the cycle of individuals caught in the criminal justice system for failure to pay fines and fees.

Millions of Americans have had their driver's licenses suspended for unpaid court fines and fees. In fact, 40% of all license suspensions are issued for conduct unrelated to driving. These suspensions fall disproportionately on those who are most severely impacted by the lack of a driver's license, particularly, the poor, and exacerbate the very issues that may have caused the failure to pay in the first place.

Without a license or access to a strong system of public transportation, these individuals lack the means to get to their jobs; to bring children to child care; and to get groceries, medical care, and other necessities in the most cost-effective way. They end up in a loop of higher expenses and lower income, and potentially steeper fines.

Ending the practice of license suspension for unpaid fines and fees also helps our law enforcement officers. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators estimates that arresting a person for driving with a suspended license can take up to nine hours of an officer's time, including waiting for a tow truck, transporting the driver to jail, filling out paperwork, making a court appearance, and other related administrative duties.


The Driving for Opportunity Act builds on a trend in many of our states to end the routine suspension of driver's licenses for unpaid fines and fees. Since 2018, Montana, Virginia, West Virginia, Idaho, and Mississippi have ended this practice. California, Wyoming, and Kentucky likewise do not suspend licenses for this reason. And, in 2016, Vermont initiated a "Driver Restoration" effort, eliminating suspension for certain civil infractions and aimed at restoring driver privileges throughout the state. Under this bill, a federal grant program will be established under the Byrne JAG program to help states that repeal these suspension laws defray the costs of reinstating licenses that have previously been stripped.

A diverse coalition supports this bill, including the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, FreedomWorks, Americans for Prosperity, Americans for Tax Reform, Justice Action Network, the Fines and Fees Justice Center, Civil Rights Corp, and


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the Due Process Institute. They recognize, as we do, that there are better ways to support law and order in our communities than to punish people for their poverty. And, we are proud to add our names to this coalition supporting the Driving for Opportunity Act.


Sincerely,



Kathleen Jennings
Delaware Attorney General



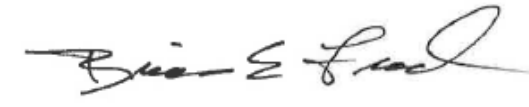
Xavier Becerra
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Kwame Raoul
Illinois Attorney General



Derek Schmidt
Kansas Attorney General



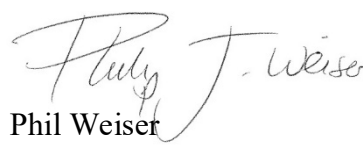
Brian Frosh
Maryland Attorney General



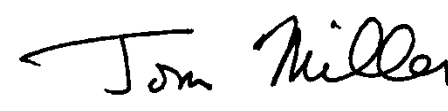
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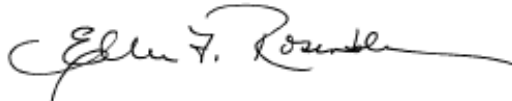
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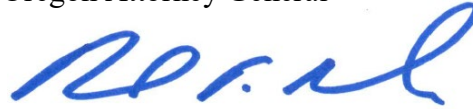
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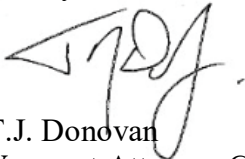
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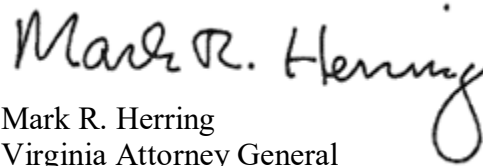
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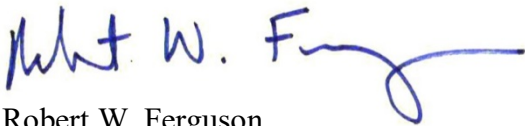
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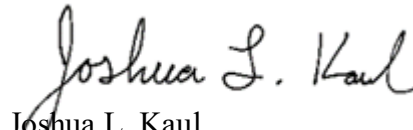
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Joshua L. Kaul
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cc: The Honorable Chris Coons
The Honorable Roger Wicker