

# Access to Driving and License Suspension Policies for the Twenty-First Century Economy

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The  
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## ABOUT



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**The Mobility Agenda** is a think tank in Washington, DC that seeks to stimulate and shape a dialogue to build public support for strengthening the labor market, benefiting our economy, workers, and communities.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE ECONOMY REQUIRES ACCESS TO DRIVING

Access to driving—including a reliable, affordable vehicle and a valid driver’s license—is vital to economic security, strong communities, and a healthy economy. Changes in the location of work and residence in the last century have dramatically altered the landscape of our nation and changed the transportation needs of communities and workers. In the first half of the 20th century, transportation to work primarily involved traveling from a dense residential area, on foot, in a bus, or in a streetcar, to nearby factories or warehouses. By the 1950s, as a result of a pattern of decentralization in the United States, workers were separated from jobs and services by both distance and travel time. In the beginning of the 20th century, only 25 percent of residents lived in suburbs. By the end of the century, suburbs were home to nearly two out of three residents and 57 percent of metropolitan-area jobs.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, most communities now depend on private vehicle access to ensure that workers can fill and retain jobs by effectively managing the distance and travel time between work and home, as well as access goods and services not well served by public transit.<sup>2</sup> Workers commuting from center city to suburb often find that mass transit does not go where or when they need to go. Driving offers more flexibility than public transit, especially since bus and subway stops are not located within a reasonable distance of every employer, and many transit providers do not offer service during off-peak hours. Access to driving also saves time lost to long waits and transfers on public transit, allows travel door-to-door, increases safety, offers more protection in bad weather, and permits people to transport heavy or bulky items like groceries.<sup>3</sup>

The necessity of cars is evident in the commuting modes chosen by workers. In 2000, less than five percent of workers took public transportation to work, while 88 percent commuted in a private vehicle. In fact, 92 percent of households own or have access to a vehicle<sup>4</sup> and 88 percent of working-age adults have a valid driver’s license.<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that people with a car are more likely to be employed, earn more, work more hours, and have more stable employment. Private vehicle access is acknowledged by scholars to be a better predictor of employment than mass transit, in part because job applicants with access to driving can reach many more jobs than those dependent on public transit.<sup>6</sup> For example, in one Los Angeles neighborhood, residents with a car can reach 59 times as many jobs within a half-hour as those dependent on public transit.<sup>7</sup>

While access to a car is important for better employment outcomes, 86 percent of *all* trips are made in a car.<sup>8</sup> People have many other important needs for transportation, including care of family members,

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1 Blumenberg, Evelyn and Margy Waller. “The Long Journey to Work: A Federal Transportation Policy for Working Families.” *The Brookings Institution Series on Transportation Reform*. Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy, July 2003.

2 Averaged across all households, commuting takes more than twice as long on public transit as it does by car.

3 Waller, Margy. “High Cost or High Opportunity Cost? Transportation and Family Economic Success,” *The Brookings Institution Policy Brief*, Center on Children and Families, no. 35, December 2005.; Blumenberg and Waller, 2003.

4 Blumenberg and Waller, 2003.

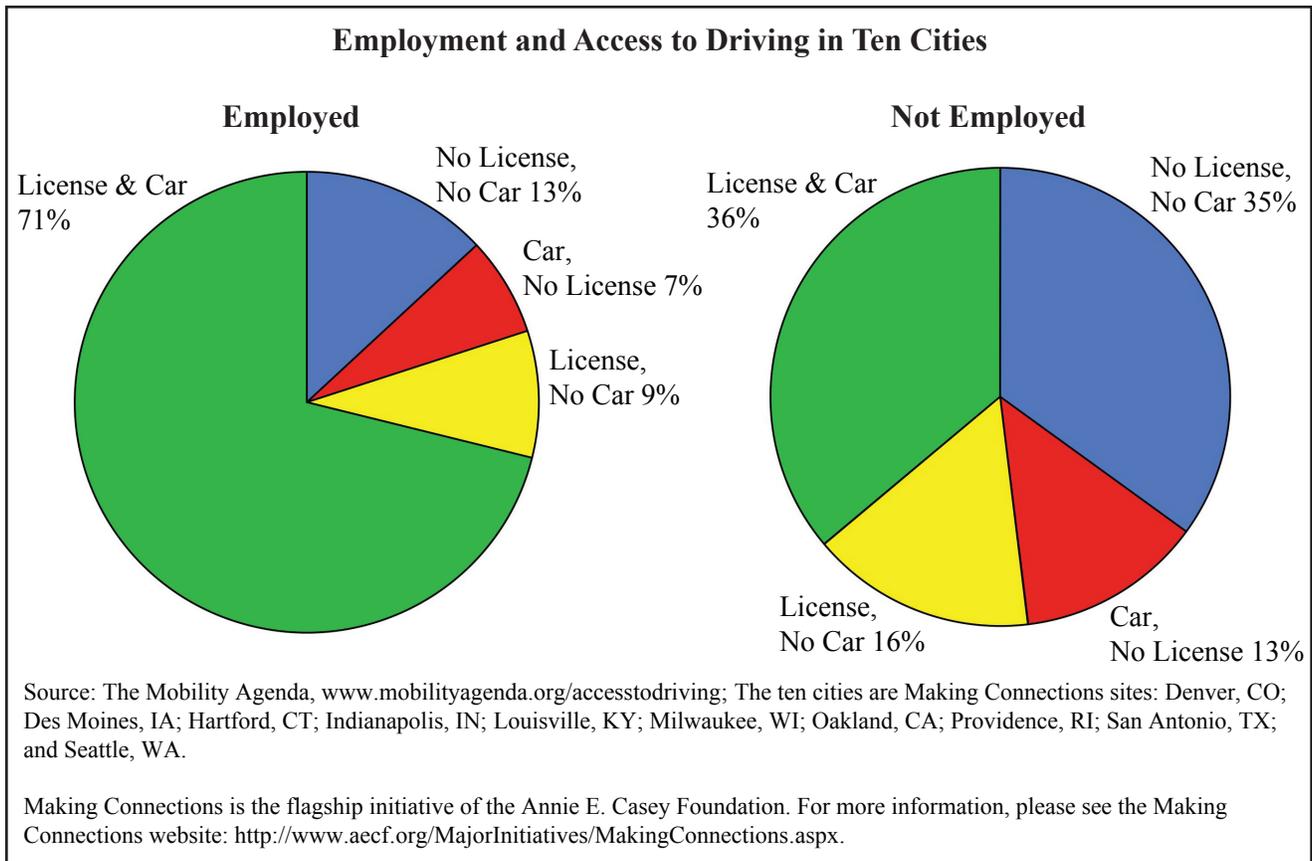
5 United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. “Licensed Drivers by Sex and Ratio to Population,” *Highway Statistics 2006*.; United States Census Bureau, *Census 2000*. [www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html](http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html). Last modified April 24, 2008.

6 Waller, 2005.; after controlling for the possibility that other factors could be causing positive employment outcomes, scholars find the positive relationship between a car and work persists.

7 Blumenberg, Evelyn and Michael Manville. “Beyond the Spatial Mismatch: Welfare Recipients and Transportation Policy,” *Journal of Planning Literature*, 19, no. 2 (November 2004), 182-205.

8 Pucher, John and John Renne. “Socioeconomics of Urban Travel: Evidence from the 2001 NHTS,” *Transportation Quarterly*, 57, no. 3 (2003).

participation in community and civic activities, and travel to school, worship, health care, and shopping.<sup>9</sup>



While the geography of metropolitan life has changed, the nation’s transportation policy has not yet evolved in ways that recognize the shift. Today, strong communities and a strong economy require policies that support affordable, reliable, and convenient transportation options. Unfortunately, recent changes in policies regarding driver’s license suspension increase the chances that employers, communities, and workers will experience the detrimental effect of license suspension or revocation for reasons that have nothing to do with road safety.<sup>10</sup> Decisionmakers and stakeholders—including representatives of law enforcement agencies, courts, academics, policy analysts, highway officials, policymakers, national transportation organizations, and departments of motor vehicles—should encourage use of the best transportation option for economic security and strong communities, which, in many cases, will mean supporting access to private vehicles driven by a worker with a valid license.

**Recent Changes in License Suspension Policies Create Barriers to Economic Security**

State policymakers originally created driver’s license requirements, which set certain standards for

<sup>9</sup> Blumenberg and Waller, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> In this report, we use the term license suspensions to refer to both suspensions and revocations, a term used in other literature and many policies. Both terms refer to removal of driving privileges. There is generally a more temporary connotation associated with suspension, whereas revocation denotes a permanent removal until the reasons for revocation have been satisfied, at which point the driver is required to reapply. Thirty of 41 states’ licensing agencies included in a survey by the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center reported defining suspension and revocation in a comparable manner.; Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center. *Motor Vehicles Affordability and Fairness Task Force: Final Report*. Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University, and New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission, 2006.

driving competency, to ensure public safety. They designed license suspensions as a legal mechanism to remove unsafe drivers from the road. In recent decades, policymakers have created new barriers to economic strength and employment by adopting legislation that makes license holding, and therefore access to legal driving, more tenuous—particularly for low-wage employees.

Beginning in the 1980s, federal policymakers began adopting legislation that encouraged license suspension for non-payment of child support. In 1996, Congress took the next step, requiring that states suspend the licenses of people unable or unwilling to pay child support. Over the past 15 years, state officials responded to this federal signal by authorizing license suspension as punishment for other non-driving offenses, including economic offenses such as failure to pay parking fines.

A survey of 14 local communities across the country reveals that failure to pay a fine or appear in court is the most likely cause of license suspension.<sup>11</sup> Consistent with these findings, reviews of suspensions in three states reveal that the most common reasons for license suspension are not related to bad driving.<sup>12</sup> Other economic reasons for license suspension include failure to comply with a child support order and failure to maintain insurance. Low-wage workers are more likely to experience suspension for these reasons.<sup>13</sup>

## THE IMPACT OF LICENSE SUSPENSIONS

After federal lawmakers set a precedent for using license suspension as a deterrent to non-driving offenses, officials in all 50 states established similar laws. Stakeholders, including the academic community and public agencies, have not yet provided public analysis of the impact of such changes in all places. However, analysts conclude that policymakers no longer use suspension only to improve safety and driving behavior, but also increasingly to discourage or sanction offenses unrelated to citizen safety on the roads. Academic reviewers agree that suspensions do have negative economic and social effects.<sup>14</sup> Recently, a working group of national organizations noted the significant burden of enforcing suspension laws and commissioned research on the changes in license suspension policy goals, reasons for suspension, and the impact of suspension on road safety. An executive summary of the commissioned research notes that drivers suspended for non-driving-related reasons present a comparatively lower safety risk than those suspended for driving reasons.<sup>15</sup> In addition, officials in several states reviewed the impact of suspensions and provided important specific examples of impact on the community and the economy.

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11 Waller, Margy, Jennifer Doleac, and Ilsa Flanagan. *Driver's License Suspension Policies*. The Brookings Institution, 2005.

12 Gebers, Michael and David DeYoung. *An Examination of the Characteristics and Traffic Risk of Drivers Suspended/Revoked for Different Reasons*. California Department of Motor Vehicles, November 2002.; Pawasarat, John and Frank Stetzer. *Removing Transportation Barriers to Employment: Assessing Driver's License and Vehicle Ownership Patterns of Low-Income Populations: Initial Findings*. Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, July 1998.; Carnegie, Jon A. *Driver's License Suspensions, Impacts, and Fairness Study: Final Report*. Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, Rutgers University. New Jersey Department of Transportation, August 2007.

13 Corkrey, Barbara. "Restoring Driver's Licenses Removes a Common Legal Barrier to Employment," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy*, January-February, 2004.; Pawasarat and Stetzer, 1998.; Carnegie, 2007. In New Jersey, 59 percent of suspensions were made exclusively for non-driving-related reasons. In Wisconsin, state law changes made in the 1980s permit local courts to suspend licenses, and a review of suspensions in Milwaukee county found that more than half were suspended solely for non-payment of fines.

14 Carnegie, 2007.; Fritschner, Selden. "Executive Summary," *Reasons for Driver's License Suspension, Recidivism, and Crash Involvement among Suspended/Revoked Drivers: A Study*. American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, 2008.; Gebers and DeYoung, 2002.

15 Carnegie, 2007.; Gebers and DeYoung, 2002.; Fritschner, 2008.

Number of States Suspending for Non-Driving-Related Reasons	
Failure to pay a motor vehicle fine, surcharge, or fee	31
Failure to pay court fines, fees, or surcharges	31
Failure to appear in court to satisfy a moving violation summons	43
Failure to appear in court to satisfy a parking ticket	8
Failure to comply with a child support order	47
Failure to maintain insurance	45
Truancy	15

Source: Presentation by Jon Carnegie, Ph.D., Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, Rutgers University. The Mobility Agenda Roundtable, March 5, 2008.

### Community Impact—Higher Cost Reduces Public Services

All residents of the community feel the impact of driver’s license suspensions. Public officials and police officers can be distracted from road safety, their primary responsibility related to licensing. And when suspensions begin to increase the cost of license enforcement, community members may see a reduction in public resources dedicated to other important public works.

Academic reviewers in two states developed information about the burden of processing suspensions under the newer laws. Milwaukee officials observed an increase in suspensions when state lawmakers gave localities the option of suspending driver’s licenses for non-driving offenses. In 1997, judges in the Milwaukee County Municipal Courts ordered 62,466 suspensions, an increase of 13,579, or 28 percent, from the previous year.<sup>16</sup> More than half of the suspensions in Milwaukee were for failure to pay fines—economic suspensions unrelated to driving safety. Suspensions ordered by judges can overburden courts, as the suspended driver may be required to appear in court to address the suspension, even if it is only for non-payment of a fine.<sup>17</sup> In New Jersey, policymakers acknowledged the community impact of license suspension when they created a Motor Vehicles Affordability and Fairness Task Force, charged with developing recommendations to control the significant increase in suspensions.<sup>18</sup>

While the number of state-level reviews is relatively limited, national attention to this issue reflects a growing concern about the burden on communities.<sup>19</sup> Leaders of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators created a working group to address concern about the cost and time involved in dealing with persons found to be driving with a suspended license. The working group, comprised

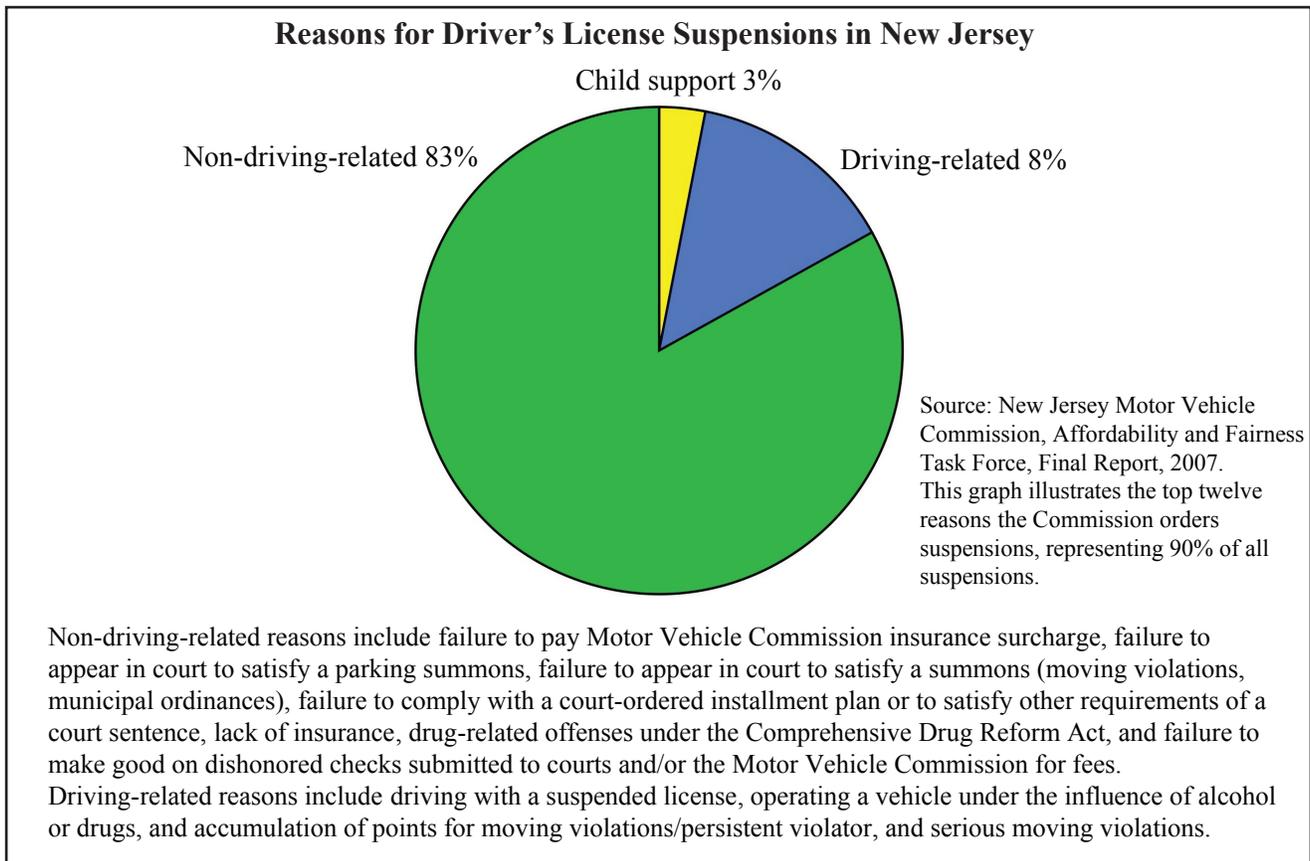
<sup>16</sup> Pawasarat and Stetzer, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Carnegie, 2007.

of motor vehicle agency representatives, law enforcement and court officials, academics, highway safety professionals, and federal officials, commissioned research on the relationship between the reasons for suspension and road safety. The group learned that suspensions for non-driving reasons increased as a percentage of all suspensions over a four-year period ending in 2006.<sup>20</sup>



Members of the group report that there is growing frustration within the law enforcement community over the practice of suspending driver's licenses for non-safety reasons, which increases the administrative workload of officers and causes law enforcement to spend a large amount of time and energy focusing on financial responsibility instead of highway safety.<sup>21</sup>

Community residents might readily support the additional cost of this workload if drivers whose licenses have been suspended for economic reasons posed a safety risk when on the road. However, the national working group determined that drivers whose licenses were suspended for non-driving reasons differ from those being punished for driving violations. Among the latter group, safety violations after suspension are much more likely, while the former pose a lower safety risk.<sup>22</sup> When an inability to pay leads to suspension for a non-driving offense, everyone suffers the consequences of this ineffective policy lever.<sup>23</sup>

20 Fritschner, 2008.

21 American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, Law Enforcement Committee. "Reviewing the Issue of the Suspended and Revoked (S/R) Driver." *A Working Group Discussion*. Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 8-9, 2005.

22 Fritschner, 2008.

23 Community residents might also consider revenue raised as a direct result of license suspension policies a benefit. However, analysts have provided very little information about the effectiveness of license suspension as a means to compel payment. Limited available information suggests some additional revenue may be raised as a result of selected suspension policies. However, not all drivers are able to pay (Carnegie, 2007). Some community leaders have encouraged more study of the effectiveness of alternative approaches like partial amnesty or payment plans to determine their effectiveness at collecting payments that would otherwise go unpaid (Milwaukee

In addition, because driving is so critical to living and working in most places, many drivers continue to drive even after their licenses are suspended.<sup>24</sup> Driving while under suspension is hard to detect, so it is difficult to enforce, which undermines the public policy. When it is detected, the consequences are usually more severe, costly, and time-consuming for all involved than the original suspension.<sup>25</sup>

### **Economic Impact—Fewer Options Mean a Weaker Labor Market**

Local communities, employers, and employees experience negative consequences as a result of license suspensions, including unemployment, lower wages, fewer employment opportunities and hiring choices, and increased car insurance costs.<sup>26</sup> Low-wage workers are likely to be disproportionately affected by license suspensions that arise from their inability to pay fines and fees. Suspending these workers' licenses can lead to additional economic distress both for them and the extended community when they are unable to get to or apply for jobs inaccessible by public transit.<sup>27</sup> Workers may experience lower wages or unemployment, while employers face the high cost of replacing workers as well as reduced hiring choices. All community residents feel the burden of a weaker economy resulting from a decrease in household expenditures and a simultaneous increase in the cost of community services.

A survey of New Jersey drivers supports these economic conclusions. Forty-two percent of drivers were not able to keep their jobs when their driver's license was suspended. Of those drivers, 45 percent could not find another job. Among those surveyed who were able to find another job, 88 percent experienced a decrease in wages.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to such impacts, individual drivers may contribute to a larger community economic downturn when faced with other costs associated with license suspension, including license reinstatement, court appearances, and legal assistance. In some states, automobile insurance costs automatically increase after a suspension, even when the suspension is for non-driving reasons. More than half of the drivers surveyed in New Jersey could not afford the increased insurance costs resulting from the license suspension.<sup>29</sup>

Employment and training providers report that suspensions contribute to difficulty in filling local job openings with qualified, trained workers. Non-driving-related economic suspensions can prevent students from filling positions for which they were trained, undermining community investments in the education system.<sup>30</sup> In addition, some employers, particularly in the construction and health care fields, require a driver's license as a precondition for employment—either because driving is part of the job, or as a way to screen applicants.<sup>31</sup> Qualified workers cannot apply for these jobs without a valid license, which limits hiring options for employers as well.<sup>32</sup>

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presentation at The Mobility Agenda Roundtable). Finally, policymakers in some jurisdictions face the need to replace or forgo significant revenue from fees and fines that would be lost if policy changes eliminated them (Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006). While these fines are not usually related to the policy goals of suspension, they can become an effective barrier to legislative action when policymakers cannot agree on a replacement for the fine revenue.

24 Gebers and DeYoung, 2002.; Pawasarat and Stetzer, 1998.

25 Gebers and DeYoung, 2002.

26 Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.

27 Pawasarat and Stetzer, 1998.

28 Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.

29 Carnegie, 2007.

30 Zimmerman, Ken and Nancy Fishman. *Roadblock on the Way to Work: Driver's License Suspension in New Jersey*. New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, October 2001.

31 Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.; Zimmerman and Fishman, 2001.

32 Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.

## STATE AND LOCAL INITIATIVES FOR LICENSE REINSTATEMENT

The Mobility Agenda conducted a national review and identified a limited number of local efforts to address the community and economic impacts of license suspension. Representatives from Milwaukee, Baltimore, and New Jersey presented information about the development and goals of local initiatives, which are described below, at the Economic Driver's License Suspension and Reinstatement Roundtable (The Mobility Agenda Roundtable), hosted by The Mobility Agenda staff at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, in March 2008.<sup>33</sup>

### **Milwaukee—License Reinstatement Initiative**<sup>34</sup>

Seventy-five percent of jobs in the Milwaukee area are located in the suburbs, making a driver's license and access to a car critical for employment, since public transit is insufficient for commuting to those jobs. By 2006, as a result of changes in state law permitting local courts to suspend licenses for failure to pay fines, one in six, or 89,000, Milwaukee County residents had a suspended license, many for reasons unrelated to safety on the road.<sup>35</sup>

Milwaukee community leaders identified the issue of driver's license suspension in 1992 and the Milwaukee Municipal Court began offering license reinstatement counseling. Over the next 14 years, community leaders and organizations employed numerous strategies to reduce economic license suspensions, including research that provided evidence of community impact, and civic activity to reduce the impact of economic license suspensions on the community.<sup>36</sup> In 1998, the Milwaukee Municipal Court officials sponsored a fine-reduction initiative and persuaded the state Department of Transportation to provide staff and technical support. In 2004, the Municipal Court temporarily offered partial amnesty to drivers with suspended licenses who were able to pay 50 percent of fines owed. Twenty-five percent of participating drivers were able to have their licenses reinstated.<sup>37</sup>

Milwaukee leaders determined that state-level policy changes would be critical to reducing the impact of economic license suspension. They have succeeded in pressing for statutory changes, including fine reduction; termination of suspensions for non-payment of non-traffic-related fines; and removal of operating after revocation, operating while suspended, and non-moving violations from habitual traffic offender status. This change has significantly decreased the number of drivers with suspended licenses.<sup>38</sup>

In 2005, community leaders, including those working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative, determined that a new center would benefit the collaborative efforts of numerous groups.<sup>39</sup> The Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability opened in 2007, with administrative help from Justice 2000 (including case management), legal representation provided by Legal Action of Wisconsin, and space donated by the Milwaukee Area Technical College. In its first eight months of existence, the Center, through the efforts of its dedicated staff, successfully

33 More information and a video of the presentations can be found on The Mobility Agenda website: [www.mobilityagenda.org/driver'slicensemeeting](http://www.mobilityagenda.org/driver'slicensemeeting).

34 For more information about Milwaukee's work on license suspension, please see: <http://www.justice-2000.org/drivers.html>.

35 Justice 2000, Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability. *2007 Program Report*, February 2008.

36 For the research conducted in Milwaukee, please see: <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/ETI/barriers/caresum.htm>.

37 Pifer, David. *Development of a Community Movement: Driver's License Reform in Milwaukee*. Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., March 3, 2008.

38 Ibid.

39 Making Connections is the flagship initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, please see the Making Connections website: <http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/MakingConnections.aspx>.

restored licenses to 51 percent of drivers completing the program.<sup>40</sup> The promising initial results of the Center and the high public profile of the issue led to positive media coverage; editorials and news articles in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in 2007 and 2008 helped increase public awareness of and support for the Center’s mission.<sup>41</sup>

The Center employs three strategies:<sup>42</sup>

- Provide direct services for suspended drivers navigating the complex reinstatement process, including case management and legal representation.
- Implement system change, including:
  - Legislative—amend state law to reduce economic license suspensions.
  - Judicial—inform court officials of the importance of reinstatement, using payment plans and community service as alternatives to fines.
  - State agency—persuade Department of Workforce Development officials to allow drivers the use of job access loans to pay fines.
- Utilize communication strategies such as:
  - Developing public understanding of and support for reduction of economic license suspensions.
  - Sharing information with drivers about the state policy of license suspension and reinstatement.

### **Maryland—Reducing Suspensions for Child Support Arrearages<sup>43</sup>**

In Baltimore, lawyers at the Legal Aid Bureau approached the issue of license suspension through the Baltimore City Child Support Project. The Project, funded by the Abell Foundation, is a specialized team within the Bureau that assists non-custodial parents who owe large back child support and face barriers to obtaining and retaining employment.<sup>44</sup> In federal welfare legislation passed in 1996, Congress required that states adopt legislation that made the suspension of licenses for child support arrearages a condition of receiving federal funds. In the first six months of 1997 in Maryland, 9,000 non-custodial parents had their licenses suspended, while only about 800 were able to achieve reinstatement by repaying arrearages.<sup>45</sup>

Legal aid lawyers identified the loss of a license as a barrier to economic stability. In representing a father whose license was suspended for non-payment of child support, lawyers made progress on state practice when the court determined that the license should be reinstated because the obligor’s ability to work was in the child’s best interest.<sup>46</sup> In addition, when representing parents with suspended licenses, legal aid lawyers have had success in getting those licenses reinstated or obtaining work-restricted licenses

*...state-level policy changes [are] critical to reducing the impact of economic license suspension.*

40 Justice 2000, Center for Driver’s License Recovery and Employability, 2008.

41 Editorial: “Unfair suspensions leave workers idling.” JS Online, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=708865>. January 19, 2008.

42 Presentation of Nichole Yunk at The Mobility Agenda Roundtable.

43 For more information about Baltimore’s work on license suspension, please see: [www.mdlab.org](http://www.mdlab.org).

44 Presentation of Kisha Brown at The Mobility Agenda Roundtable.

45 Henry, Ronald K. “Child Support at a Crossroads: When the Real World Intrudes upon Academics and Advocates.” *Family Law Quarterly*, 33, no. 1, 1999.

46 Hatcher, Daniel and Hannah Lieberman. “Breaking the Cycle of Defeat for ‘Deadbroke’ Noncustodial Parents Through Advocacy on Child Support Issues.” *Clearinghouse Review Journal on Poverty Law and Policy*, May-June 2005.

that allow for travel to and from work during a suspension.<sup>47</sup> In 2004, Project lawyers were invited to assist with developing and supporting state legislation that requires Child Support Enforcement Administration officials to consider multiple factors before suspending a license, and adds exceptions to license suspension for non-custodial parents. These promising outcomes in Baltimore illustrate the important role legal aid can play in license reinstatement.

Lawyers at Baltimore’s Legal Aid Bureau continue to work to reduce license suspensions and make this issue a priority in the community. Their efforts currently include:

- Providing the community with written materials about legal options and requirements for reinstatement and work-restricted licenses.<sup>48</sup>
- Providing legal forms requesting reinstatement that parents not represented by legal aid can use in an appeal of license suspension.
- Training staff at the child support enforcement agency about the legal requirements for license suspension and reinstatement.
- Developing and sharing communication strategies that offer information for caseworkers and parents, as well as increase community-wide attention to the issue.
- Participating in a joint initiative with the Job Opportunities Task Force, addressing systemic transportation barriers to employment, including outreach presentations, brief or extended individual legal advice, and education of policymakers.

*...promising outcomes  
...illustrate the important  
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license reinstatement.*

### **New Jersey—Research, License Reinstatement Initiative, State Commission<sup>49</sup>**

In 2001, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice published “Roadblock on the Way to Work” (Roadblock),<sup>50</sup> a publication designed to raise awareness of the impact of license suspension on the state’s labor market and economic development plans.<sup>51</sup> In July 2001, nearly 200,000 New Jersey drivers had suspended licenses; more than half of the suspensions imposed the previous year were for failure to pay fines or fees, not for any safety violation.<sup>52</sup> After the report’s release, and as part of legislation resulting from a comprehensive review of the Department of Motor Vehicles, the state legislature created the Motor Vehicles Affordability and Fairness Task Force to study non-driving-related suspensions.<sup>53</sup> The group found that the current legal framework for license suspensions had unintentionally devolved from a system addressing road safety into one that creates barriers to economic mobility.<sup>54</sup>

The task force commissioned research and developed recommendations based on that evidence. Its recommendations included establishing an amnesty program to help correct the system’s defects,

47 Hatcher and Lieberman, 2005.

48 Maryland Legal Aid Bureau, Inc. “What You Need to Know About Child Support: Driver’s License Suspensions.” Revised October 2006.

49 For more information about New Jersey’s work on license suspension, please see: [www.state.nj.us/mvc/PressReleases/archives/2006/reportAFTF.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/mvc/PressReleases/archives/2006/reportAFTF.pdf).

50 Zimmerman and Fishman, 2001.

51 New Jersey Institute for Social Justice website: [http://www.njisj.org/urban\\_nj.html](http://www.njisj.org/urban_nj.html). Published May 24, 2008.

52 Zimmerman and Fishman, 2001.

53 Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.

54 Ibid.

providing judges more discretion in suspension cases, educating the public about license suspension laws, and considering the creation of a restricted license category as a way to help drivers with license suspensions retain their jobs.<sup>55</sup> Stakeholders believe progress on the recommendations has been prevented by impediments to reform that include the difficulty of replacing revenue generated by license suspensions, the success of license suspension as leverage to obtain payments from drivers who are able to pay, resistance to change, fear of appearing “soft on crime,” and perceived safety concerns surrounding suspended drivers.<sup>56</sup>

Also, just after the release of the Roadblock report, community leaders created the License Reinstatement Program, a pilot initiative of the Essex County municipal courts, permitting drivers whose licenses had been suspended because of unpaid fines to consolidate their county fines and have their licenses reinstated while they made payments over time on the consolidated amount.<sup>57</sup> Based on that experience, stakeholders have identified key considerations for development of reinstatement initiatives:

- Broaden the impact by developing a statewide initiative and allowing the inclusion of all charges.
- Improve technology and administration to increase efficiency and ease the monitoring of established payment plans.
- Increase outreach so drivers with a suspended license who are eligible for fine consolidation have meaningful access to the program.
- Request that the state’s motor vehicle administration provide technological and administrative support.

Finally, in 2003, the Institute staff prepared and released “Getting Back on the Road: A Manual for Addressing Driver’s License Suspension in New Jersey.” This manual is a guide to reinstatement for people with suspended licenses—or for others working on their behalf. Institute staff has provided instruction on using the manual for state and local officials, as well as employees at community-based organizations.<sup>58</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Policymakers at all levels of government play a role in developing and enforcing laws governing driver’s license suspension and reinstatement. In limited instances, federal officials also require driver’s license suspension. At The Mobility Agenda Roundtable, participants agreed that a diverse coalition of national, state, and local stakeholders could support efforts to implement these recommendations and many of the attendees expressed a willingness to participate. Policymakers, community leaders, and others with an interest in the issue should take these action steps:

### **1. Build public understanding and support for policies that recognize the importance of access to driving.**

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Presentation of Jon Carnegie at The Mobility Agenda Roundtable.

<sup>57</sup> New Jersey Institute for Social Justice website: [http://www.njisj.org/urban\\_nj.html](http://www.njisj.org/urban_nj.html).

<sup>58</sup> Fishman, Nancy and John Barlett. *Getting Back on the Road: A Manual for Addressing Driver’s License Suspension in New Jersey*. New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and the Urban League Clinic of Rutgers Law School, May 2003.

Stakeholders must develop and use *framing science research* to identify an effective way of shaping the license suspension issue that helps people recognize the importance of driving and the value of particular interventions.<sup>59</sup> The research will provide a critical new resource for all stakeholders and can strengthen efforts to advance policies on access to driving across the nation.

Absent a new communications strategy, the public may resist policy solutions on a variety of grounds: resentment of government “handouts” to the poor, the belief that a “free ride for lawbreakers” is not equitable, reluctance to use tax dollars to assist with driving, and so on. In addition, many policymakers are concerned about environmental and congestion issues in ways that constrain their thinking about policy solutions to transportation barriers and lead them to conclude that public transit is an adequate solution. Fortunately, the relative lack of visibility surrounding the issue of access to driving affords an enormous opportunity to research and develop an effective frame for introducing the issue in a way that builds support for policy solutions.

Leaders should seek to develop the communications research simultaneously with other research (such as state or local data on suspensions, if necessary) and utilize the knowledge developed in all strategic endeavors to improve access to driving. Information about an effective way to present the issue of access to driving will be a *necessary* step in the challenging effort to reduce the economic and social impact of license suspensions for non-driving reasons.

## **2. Review and consider rewriting federal and state laws that use license suspension as a penalty for non-driving offenses.**

Policymakers should review the effectiveness of state and local policy on suspension for non-driving offenses in meeting legislative goals. They should rescind those laws that do not lead to desired results or are harmful, particularly since suspension is not a proven means of keeping people from driving or of compelling or preventing specific behavior.<sup>60</sup>

## **3. Offer and expand restricted-use or conditional licenses.**

Policymakers should determine specific circumstances for conditional licenses, ensuring equitable treatment of persons in comparable situations across jurisdictions, and providing for education and outreach to improve meaningful access. Since drivers with conditional licenses would be able to drive to work, child care providers, medical offices, or other designated destinations, offering such licenses should reduce the negative economic and social impact of suspensions. In 2004, conditional licenses were available in 39 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>61</sup>

## **4. Establish alternatives to license suspension.**

Policymakers should establish sliding-scale payment plans based on income, ensuring that such a payment option is available to all. Drivers should be able to continue driving when they agree to a payment plan and make regular payments. Time frames for payments should be manageable for all

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<sup>59</sup> For more information about framing science research, see Framing Public Issues, <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/strategic-analysis/FramingPublicIssuesfinal.pdf?tr=y&aid=1886706> and The Mobility Agenda: Reframing the Poverty Debate, <http://www.mobilityagenda.org/reframingthepovertydebate>.

<sup>60</sup> Joerger, Mark. *Profile of Driver Problems Follow-up Evaluation: An Examination of Driver Demographic Information and Driving Record*. Oregon Department of Transportation, 2002.; Carnegie, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Carnegie, 2007.

drivers, since certain economic circumstances such as a low-wage job, a downturn in the economy, or layoffs could make it difficult for some people to adhere to an arbitrary time limit.<sup>62</sup> In addition, policymakers should give courts the authority to offer the option of community service hours in lieu of fines or fees as a means to reduce the disparate impact of economic sanctions on those who must drive to work and to essential services like child care.

*Build public understanding and support for policies that recognize the importance of access to driving.*

#### **5. Amend laws and practices regarding suspension of driver’s licenses for non-payment of child support.**

While federal policymakers have required that states suspend the licenses of those who do not pay child support, state policymakers can determine criteria for such suspensions. They should require that decisionmakers consider various factors before suspending the license of a non-custodial parent, including whether the suspension would be a barrier to work, violate the best interests of the child, or cause undue hardship. Policymakers should offer an exemption for non-custodial parents when they are unable to pay. In addition, the option of a payment plan could be offered to low-wage workers, and unemployed parents could be permitted to drive in order to seek work.

#### **6. Improve information systems to reduce economic license suspensions and expedite reinstatements.**

Local legal aid office staff or *pro bono* lawyers (volunteers sometimes available through a local bar association) should provide information about the law and the legal process at community centers, job training and employment offices, and legal aid offices. Officials should ensure that notification of a forthcoming or ordered license suspension is timely and clear. The notice should include information about ways to avoid suspension or expedite reinstatement, as well as specific information about the suspension, including when it starts, how long it will last, what it is for, and what is necessary to avoid the suspension or request reinstatement. The notice should also provide information about conditional licenses and payment plans where such options are available. Finally, officials should design the notice to include information about contacts for questions or requests for clarification, as well as information about legal representation and advice.

#### **7. Develop accessible information about state laws and the impact of non-driving suspensions. Make recommendations for systemic changes that will alleviate the negative impacts of economic suspensions for these violations.<sup>63</sup>**

Utilizing communications research (see recommendation 1 above), stakeholders can build public understanding of current policies, as well as the benefits of recommended policy changes.

<sup>62</sup> Zimmerman and Fishman, 2001.; Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> See the previous section for information about the New Jersey initiative.

## 8. Reduce suspensions and improve access to reinstatement with community education and system change.<sup>64</sup>

Policymakers, employers, judges, lawyers, and academics should collaborate to ensure that drivers whose licenses have been suspended have access to advice and services to navigate the system when seeking reinstatement. Community leaders should create and disseminate informational pamphlets to individuals, the news media, policymakers, and other stakeholders about the impact of license suspension on individuals and the community, as well as options for, and benefits from, reinstatement or conditional licenses.

In the absence of a community-based center for service delivery, legal aid and *pro bono* lawyers should create and provide forms for drivers who represent themselves at a hearing. Those drivers should be able to use the forms to appeal or request an exemption from license suspensions.<sup>65</sup>

To achieve long-term, systemic changes, leaders should design and recommend policy changes that benefit the state or locality with fewer suspensions where road safety is not a significant factor. Leaders seeking policy changes should use communications research (see recommendation 1 above) to develop media and campaign materials for education, services, and system change.

## CONCLUSION

Policymakers and other stakeholders—including representatives of law enforcement agencies, courts, academics, policy analysts, highway officials, national transportation organizations, and departments of motor vehicles—agree on the need to investigate and address the negative impacts resulting from

*Today, in the United States, residents are highly dependent on access to driving, which requires a reliable vehicle and a valid driver's license.*

non-driving-related driver's license suspensions. Today, in the United States, residents are highly dependent on access to driving, which requires a reliable vehicle and a valid driver's license. In strong communities, residents can easily get to work, shopping, and other services, usually by driving there. Policymakers must recognize and address the community and economic impact of license suspensions for non-driving offenses. All residents experience the effect of these suspensions on workers, employers, local labor markets, law enforcement, state agencies, and

courts. Fortunately, a broad and diverse group of stakeholders is interested in addressing the required systemic changes, and in a position to do so, provided they have the information necessary to develop a communications strategy to successfully explain and support recommended policy changes.

<sup>64</sup> See the previous section for information about the Milwaukee initiative.

<sup>65</sup> In Baltimore, Legal Aid Bureau, Inc. has created *pro se* appeal forms for license suspensions that violate one of seven exceptions to license suspension for non-custodial parents.

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