

Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability
A Program of Justice 2000
Challenges, Impact, and Solutions Concerning the Issue of
Driver's License Suspensions in Milwaukee County

CHALLENGES

- **Low-income students under age 18 have no way to get a license.**
 - No affordable driver's education in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).
 - No way to pay for mandatory behind-the-wheel training.
- **License sanctions are used for many purposes other than as a penalty for unsafe driving.**
 - Unpaid non-traffic juvenile tickets result in license suspensions.
 - Unpaid traffic tickets result in license suspensions.
 - Drug offenses result in a minimum 6 month suspension.
 - Revocations imposed for Operating While Suspended or Operating After Revocation.
 - Revocations not related to safe driving require Safety Responsibility Insurance ("SR22").
- **License restoration is complicated and confusing for many low-income individuals.**
 - Milwaukee and Waukesha counties have two circuit courts and 35 municipal courts.
 - Low-income individuals are unable to pay their fines.
 - License restoration often requires multiple steps in multiple courts.
 - Individuals have difficulty completing the multiple steps needed to obtain a license.

IMPACT

- **Individuals are unable to find family-supporting work without a driver's license.**
 - Three-fourths of the job openings in the Metro Milwaukee Area were located in the suburbs and the exurban counties.¹
 - In central city Milwaukee, job seekers outnumber full-time openings by a gap of 7 to 1 (UWM-ETI study).
 - They are not hired for insurance reasons or they are viewed as irresponsible.
 - Employment in many transportation and construction jobs requires a driver's license.
 - Students start without a license and go down hill from there.
 - The lack of a driver's license leads to the start of a criminal record.
- **The current enforcement scheme is inefficient and expensive to maintain.**
 - The Department of Transportation costs increase for license restoration activities.
 - Court costs are increased in municipal and misdemeanor courts.
 - Police and jail costs increase.
 - Prosecutor and public defender costs increase.
- **The current system has unintended social costs.**
 - There is a disparate impact on minorities: less than half of Milwaukee County African-American and Hispanic adults have a valid driver's license compared to 85% of white adults (UWM-ETI Study).
 - The system criminalizes behavior that is often due to poverty.

¹ University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Employment and Training Institute (UWM-ETI), 2006.
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GOALS

- Improve student employment preparation and motivation to complete high school.
- Eliminate barriers to employment and apprenticeship training.
- Improve an individual's ability to find and keep family-supporting employment.
- Improve a worker's ability to get to work.

STRATEGY

- Increase the number of students licensed by age 18 through universal driver's education.
- Limit driver's license sanctions to unsafe drivers.
- Utilize other means than driver license suspension when fines are unpaid.
- Increase the ease with which individuals resolve existing license problems.
- Provide support and services to individuals who desire to restore their license privileges.

A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

- **Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability's *Direct Service Component*:**
 - Through a triage intake process, we determine if the case is uncomplicated, needs some support, or is hopeless.
 - Client support and community service supervision keeps people on track.
 - Legal assistance for those who cannot succeed without legal help.
 - Indigence fund helps indigent individuals take the last step.
- **Advocate for greater fairness in the traffic conviction penalty system and to provide alternatives to fines for persons below poverty levels:**
 - Eliminate mandatory suspensions of driver's license in drug convictions.
 - Eliminate automatic revocation on the 4th OWS.
 - Eliminate the need for SR22 insurance for OWS and OAR revocations.
 - End SR22 insurance for Occupational Licenses when not related to unsafe driving.
 - Make Occupational Licenses available to never licensed individuals.
- **Advocate for judicial system cooperation which will result in increased certainty and consistency in driver's license cases:**
 - Increase coordination and consistency among circuit and municipal courts.
 - Streamline decision-making in post judgment matters.
 - Increase the use of alternatives to suspension or jail for nonpayment of fines.
 - Easy access to payment plans for those who can pay.
 - Allow community service for those who cannot pay.
 - Tax intercept when individuals do not take steps to satisfy their obligation.
- **Restore universal driver's education to Milwaukee schools.**
 - Restore driver's education for low-income students in MPS and statewide.
 - Driver's education as an incentive for school attendance and academic achievement.
 - Collaborative programs/public-private partnerships between MPS and community based organizations to provide youth with assistance to pass the written test and behind the wheel.
 - Driver's education as a part of employment and training programs for youth.