



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Free to Drive: Senator Tim Kennedy & Buffalo Community Leaders Announce Support for National Campaign to End Driver's License Suspensions for Unpaid Fines

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY September 10, 2019

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BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) and Assemblymember Pamela Hunter (D-Syracuse) joined community leaders in both Buffalo and Syracuse Tuesday to announce support for a national movement to end the suspension of drivers licenses based on an inability to pay traffic ticket fines or failure to appear in court. The state legislators sponsor S.5348A/A.7463A, which repeals state law that allows for the suspension of licenses based on

the failure to pay these fees, as well as creates a payment plan system for drivers.

According to [data provided by the Driven by Justice Coalition](#), during a recent 28-month period, New York issued over 1.6 million driver's license suspensions related to traffic debt. Driver's license suspension rates in New York are nearly nine times higher in the ten poorest communities compared to the ten wealthiest. In Upstate New York, 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.

"This bill isn't removing an obligation to pay a fine or fee; it's simply making it more accessible for drivers to pay down any incurred debt responsibly and realistically, and removing a barrier that currently punishes New Yorkers for being poor," said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. "Through this bill, we're not only lifting the suspensions tied to unpaid traffic fines, but we're creating a system for New Yorkers to pay these fees efficiently and without fear of losing a job, missing a rent payment, or forfeiting an education due to personal and financial challenges. This measure has already been enacted in several other states and is currently being considered in many others. New York needs to catch up. Assemblymember Hunter and I will be urging our respective houses to consider this bill immediately once legislative session resumes."

"As the data shows, debt related driver's license suspensions are drastically higher among low-income communities and especially low-income people of color. As the representative of one of the most economically disadvantaged communities of color in the country, it is imperative that the driver's license suspension process is sensibly reformed as soon as possible," said **Assemblymember Pamela Hunter**. "An income based repayment plan will achieve a greater level of compliance for the state and, more importantly, it will give low-income drivers a realistic opportunity to put traffic fines and fees behind them. Properly licensed drivers are more able to support their families and avoid needless contact with the

criminal justice system. I look forward to passing this legislation as soon as possible when the legislative session resumes in January.”

The African American Health Equity Task Force, The Bronx Defenders, the Fines and Fees Justice Center, and the National Center for Law and Economic Justice co-lead the Driven by Justice Coalition, a partnership of grassroots, economic justice and civil rights organizations, public defenders, and directly impacted people that seeks 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. The coalition supports the nationwide Free to Drive Campaign, which launched today to call for an end to debt-related driver’s license suspensions across the country.

“Across the country, the movement against driver's license suspensions that unjustly punish folks simply for being poor is gathering steam," said **Rev. George F. Nicholas, M.Div., pastor of Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church and co-convenor of Buffalo's African American Health Equity Task Force.** “Six states have stopped suspending licenses for nonpayment; at least six other states are considering the same reform. We thank Sen. Kennedy and the New York State Senate for passing the is reform last session, and we urge the Assembly to do the same in the new session."

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