



Senate Bill 881

Driver's License Suspensions

As Introduced January 15, 2016

SUMMARY

SB 881 stops license suspensions for failure to pay or appear on minor traffic tickets.

ISSUE

Traffic offenses represent the largest number of charges prosecuted in state and local courts throughout the nation, according to the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators. A ticket in California for an infraction such as a broken tail light, expired tags, or fare evasion, can ultimately lead to a suspended driver's license if a defendant does not pay or make a court appearance.

Suspending a license for failure to appear or pay a fine is an overly harsh punishment that does not fit the offense and undermines the defendant's ability to hold a job and make amends. Studies show that people who lose their driver's licenses often lose their jobs, too. That makes it tougher for them to pay any fines or fees charged for minor traffic offenses. In addition, unnecessary driver's license suspensions add to the burden – and costs – of law enforcement agencies and courts.

The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators asserts that eliminating driver's license suspensions will significantly reduce the burden on departments of motor vehicles, law enforcement, the courts, and society. Furthermore, the court already has other sanctions it can impose, such as garnishing wages or bank accounts, that are effective in enforcing traffic fine payment and deterring against failure to pay or appear in court.

SB 881 (Hertzberg)

This bill ensures that courts and counties will not suspend driver's licenses as a means of collecting court-ordered debt associated with non-safety traffic offenses. SB 881 explicitly declares that reckless and drunk driving offenses are not included in this change.

SUPPORT

Western Center on Law & Poverty (Sponsor)
American Civil Liberties Union—California (Co-Sponsor)
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East Bay Community Law Center (Co-Sponsor)
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