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Chair Humphries, Vice-Chair Lewis, Ranking Minority Member Carmichael, and members of the committee,

My name is Noah Bein, and I am state policy manager for the Justice Action Network (JAN), an organization working with state legislators across the country to advance bipartisan criminal justice laws that keep the public safe. I write today to testify in support of Senate Bill 500. This legislation is attempting to address a serious problem that is crippling Kansas' economy, diverting law enforcement resources from violent crime, and holding back Kansans across the state: **127,116 Kansans** have their driver's license suspended or held solely due to unpaid fines and fees—a figure recently estimated to result in **\$1.61 billion in earnings losses** suffered by the state each year.ⁱ

JAN and other organizations strongly support a simple, effective solution to this problem that is already in place in states like Utah, Kentucky, and Mississippi: prohibiting suspensions for inability to pay a fine or fee. In comparison, SB 500 offers a statutory scheme that is more complicated, bureaucratic, and costly—and still allows people to lose their license for reasons unrelated to dangerous driving. Kansans deserve the same laws on this issue as Mississippi, Kentucky, Georgia, Michigan, Idaho, West Virginia, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, among other states.ⁱⁱ Your committee should ask: what does Kansas know that lawmakers and law enforcement leaders in these states do not? And why should Kansas' economy suffer because of this discrepancy?

However, after thoughtful negotiation and compromise with law enforcement and other stakeholders, the Senate Judiciary committee strengthened the bill through several amendments, and we now support the legislation in a first step toward addressing this enormous problem for the state.

Conservative lawmakers strongly support prohibiting the suspension of driver's licenses due to failure to pay or appear.

- As mentioned above, state law does not allow suspensions or holds for failure to pay in states like Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Utah, among many others.
- Full prohibition of drivers license suspension for inability to pay is model policy issued by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). In 2018, ALEC issued a "[Resolution in Support of Limiting Driver's License Suspensions to Violations that Involve Dangerous Driving](#)."ⁱⁱⁱ The resolution states:
 - *"A person whose driver's license is suspended will often find it more difficult to earn a living and therefore pay the debt they owe to the government. The number of individuals with a suspended license also places a burden on the limited resources of law enforcement. This resolution encourages state policymakers to revise laws to limit driver's license suspensions*



imposed for violations against the government to conduct that involves offenders with dangerous driving such as drunk driving or multiple moving violations.”

Numerous studies show that states pay an enormous economic cost for suspending driver’s licenses for reasons unrelated to dangerous driving. In Kansas, those losses total more than \$1.6 billion.

- In a brief released last year, one analysis *conservatively* estimated that each driver’s license suspended or held due to unpaid fines and fees results in ***an average of \$12,700 in annual earnings losses.***
- This means the 127,116 debt-based driver’s licenses in Kansas lose the state’s economy ***\$1.61 billion each year.***
- These are losses that Kansas’ economy must suffer while other states are unburdened.

These suspensions also impose a public safety penalty on Kansas by diverting scarce law enforcement time away from fighting violent crime. In other states that have a full prohibition, law enforcement can instead focus on preventing and solving serious violent offenses taking place in their communities.

- As a former staffer for the Charles Koch Institute once put it: “...when an already overburdened police force must use finite resources and expend significant staff hours to pull over, transport, often jail, and attend court dates with safe drivers who have been driving with a suspended license, it decreases public safety.”^{iv}

Kansas’ reforms in this area should reflect the best possible policy and practice. We ask that you support SB 500 to move Kansans forward by lifting this costly and counterproductive drag on your state’s economy.

If JAN can assist your committee by providing research, state examples, or other information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ The estimate of the number of Kansans’ with driver’s licenses suspended or held solely due to unpaid fines and fees was provided by the Kansas Department of Revenue.

ⁱⁱ For example, see: Mississippi HB 1352 (2019) <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2019/pdf/HB/1300-1399/HB1352SG.pdf>;

ⁱⁱⁱ Resolution in Support of Limiting Driver’s License Suspensions to Violations that Involve Dangerous Driving,, <https://alec.org/model-policy/resolution-in-support-of-limiting-drivers-license-suspensions-to-violations-that-involve-dangerous-driving/>

^{iv} “Common sense on crime and driver’s licenses,” Ewan Watt, USA Today, March 2, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/03/02/dont-suspend-drivers-licenses-for-no-good-reason-column/98481984/>