

Counseling Inc

An individualized counseling experience

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Honorable Chair Representative Proehl,
Vice Chair Representative Ryckman, Sr.,
Ranking Minority Member Rep. Emily Perry, and other Honorable Members of this Committee:

Thank you for this hearing on HB2009 and this opportunity to express my support for it. Prior to my current position as Director of my own Substance Abuse and Mental Health Counseling Practice in Wichita this past year, I was for three years the Addiction Treatment Supervisor for COMCARE and that Sedgwick County Drug Court. I have also previously been Clinical and Addiction Treatment Supervisor at the Wichita and Sedgwick County Day Reporting Centers. In these respective roles I have worked with countless clients who have had their licenses suspended due to inability to pay their traffic fines for non-dui related offenses. This has greatly impaired or in some cases all but eliminated the opportunity for them to gain employment, and/or to be legal while doing so, in the face of paying insurmountable fines ranging from a few hundred to thousands of dollars. This not only became their source of disenfranchisement, but it also became an obstacle to their recovery, that employment is so vital to in terms of survival and feelings of self-worth.

This past week I had a client who has been very successful in her recovery stop by offices to report how well she was doing, but to also advise me of her fears if she gets caught driving on a suspended driver's license because she cannot yet afford the \$400 in past due traffic fines she is saving for. She is 25, has a job and place of her own now for she and her three kids ages 6 and under. She said it would dramatically change her life if she could pay on her fines and be legal. I have at least 5 of my 30 active adult clients for whom this would also be true.

While I understand the importance of the accountability of our citizenry, I also believe that particularly in these tough economic times there is a need to devise a system that would allow traffic offenders to gain a restricted drivers license as proposed and set forth in HB2009. As it stands now, counties and municipalities will never collect on some of the cumulatively exorbitant fines and get these monies, while many of these individuals will never have a drivers license in their lifetime and have the capacity to reach their full potential as a tax paying citizen and productive member of society. Criminal justice involved clients get buried in the system and lose hope, because in large part, they are people of very limited means. Both parole and probation officers have expressed concerns that the courts are asking some of these people to break the law in order to comply with the law, in terms of gaining employment and meeting their

legal obligations with treatment, etc. I believe some judges share these concerns. If we doubt that, consider the choices a person has here and the chances one might take to put food on the table for their families.

As I recall from earlier testimony that I submitted in 2008 as it related to the Senator Phil Journey proposing same with SB291, this is a much larger problem than the relatively small criminally justice population I focusing on, and I have heard anywhere from 60,000 – 120,000 Kansans now have non-dui related suspended drivers licenses. I believe that the carrot and stick approach suggested by now Judge Journey is the right approach. It mandated that those applying for a restricted driver's license be required to provide proof of insurance and meet their monthly fine payment plan in order to have this privilege, which in my view equate with rent and food on the table. I understand that this will entail significant funding, and not everyone will be successful in this endeavor, but I believe this is a tremendous opportunity to make an investment in Kansas and Kansans that will pay great dividends for years to come in terms of gaining unpaid fines and creating much more productive and law-abiding citizens. It has been my pleasure to have input on this matter and welcome further input in support of this very important legislation.

Sincerely,

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