



Support HB 3729:

Help Texans resolve their tickets without destroying their livelihoods

Low-income people throughout Texas become trapped in a cycle of poverty when they cannot afford to pay traffic tickets and other citations. They lose their driver licenses for not paying, then get more tickets for driving without a license, which they often must do to earn a living. Eventually, they receive arrest warrants and can end up in jail for days, weeks, or even months. While in jail, they lose their jobs and housing and are driven even deeper into poverty.

HB 3729 (White) would provide judges with new tools that still hold people accountable while avoiding this counterproductive cycle, by doing the following:

- **Releasing people from jail if they have been held on their tickets for more than 3 days:** Many jurisdictions across Texas are routinely jailing people who cannot pay their tickets for days, weeks, or months at a time. While in jail, many people lose their jobs and housing. Because many are single parents, some even risk losing their children because they can't call to make childcare arrangements after being unexpectedly jailed. **HB 3729** would limit jail stays to three days, after which they will be given full jail credit for the amount owed.
- **Allowing qualified low-income people to register their vehicles and get their driver licenses:** Currently more than 230,000 people are unable to get or renew their licenses until they pay off their tickets, and more than 370,000 vehicles cannot be registered until the owners' tickets are paid.¹ People without a current registration are more likely to be pulled over and then receive more tickets for driving without a valid license or registration. Under **HB 3729**, people who are unable to pay their fines can still get their licenses and register their vehicles.
- **Ensuring access to courts to resolve unpaid fines:** In 2015, over 2.9 million warrants were issued for failing to appear for or failing to pay fine-only tickets.² People with warrants for tickets are often afraid to go to court to take care of them for fear of getting arrested. They then receive more tickets for failing to appear, leading to more warrants. **HB 3729** would allow people to go to court to resolve their tickets without getting arrested for doing so.
- **Notifying people about alternatives to full payment and expanding community service options:** **HB 3729** would require courts to notify people about their options for alternatives to full payment if they are unable to pay their tickets in full. It would also expand community service options, allowing people to work off their ticket debt at schools, churches, and other places of worship.
- **Waiving non-punitive court costs and reducing fines for qualified low-income people:** **HB 3729** would make ticket debt more manageable for qualified low-income Texans by waiving their court costs, which are non-punitive under Texas law, and reducing their fines. This would achieve the goals of punishment without driving already struggling people deeper into poverty. **HB 3729** would also get rid of fees that apply only to low-income people, such as a \$25-per-ticket fee to get on a payment plan.

(see other side for citations and contact information)

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¹ Email from Pamela Harden, Tex. Dep't. of Pub. Safety, to Sushma Smith, Chief of Staff, Office of Tex. Senator José Rodríguez, (Nov. 9, 2016) (on file with authors).

² Office of Court Administration, Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary: FY 2015, at Detail 45, 48 (2016).