

# New Ohio law ends driver's license suspensions for unpaid fines. What do you need to know?

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Columbus Dispatch

Published April 4, 2025

Many drivers across Ohio are without a license for behavior unrelated to dangerous driving. A new law going into effect Wednesday will make it easier for drivers to get their licenses back and harder to suspend them.

The law, [signed](#) by Gov. Mike DeWine in January, will lift driver's license suspensions because of unpaid debt, including unpaid court fines or fees. About 600,000 of the 1 million driver's licenses suspended in Ohio from 2016 to 2020 were debt-related, according to a 2022 [report](#) from The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles spokesperson Lindsey Bohrer said in a statement that the BMV does not have an estimate on how many licenses will be reinstated, but as of January 2025, there were 162,387 people with a license suspension for any reason.

Before this change, people with unpaid suspensions who could not afford to repay them would often continue to drive and get penalized again. Lawmakers argued this created an unfair cycle and made it harder for drivers to get to work to earn money to repay these fines.

"Your ability to pay a fine or a fee is in no way connected to your ability to safely operate a vehicle, so using a suspension as a method to collect debt from people holds them back, and also, it's not a very effective way to collect debt," said Zack Eckles, senior policy advocate for The Ohio Poverty Law Center

Starting Wednesday, the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles will work with local courts to identify and end these suspensions. The Ohio BMV has until May 9 to lift them.

## **How can I get my driver's license reinstated?**

Ohioans with a debt-related suspension will receive a letter in the mail notifying them that their suspension has ended. That letter will include instructions on how to obtain a new ID, including whether the BMV needs any more information. People with a suspension for reasons wiped out by the new law will no longer have to pay a reinstatement fee to the BMV.

If someone has a debt-related suspension and another suspension that will not be lifted under the new law, like a suspension for driving under the influence, they will be notified by the BMV with instructions on potential ways to get their license reinstated.

Fees to reinstate licenses started at \$15 and maxed out at \$650. Bohrer said the new law will reduce the maximum to \$600.

Bohrer said people on a reinstatement payment plan should not stop making payments until the BMV has notified them. If they stop making them, their license will go back under suspension.

People who need to update their address to receive these letters can do it [online](#).

If a person's license was suspended and expired for more than six months, they may be required to retake the driver's test.

This law also stops courts from imposing vehicle registration suspensions for failing to pay court fines or fees and will end any current registration blocks imposed for those reasons.

"We're really happy that the legislature has done this," Eckles said. "We hope they keep working on the issue. There's more to do, and hopefully, people who have these suspension types are reaching out to the BMV to make sure that their address is updated with the BMV, so if they are eligible, they'll get notice."

The Statehouse bureau [previously reported](#) the new law will also:

- No longer allow license suspensions or denials for truancy. Anyone with suspensions or denials for truancy can apply to have that removed.
- Eliminate fees owed from suspensions given out from a discontinued program that randomly selected drivers to provide proof of insurance.
- Decrease the time when driving without insurance or proof of financial responsibility is considered a repeat offense from five years to one year.
- Allow people with suspensions for unpaid child support to make requests to local courts to get driving privileges.
- Eliminate license suspensions for drug abuse unless they were convicted of selling drugs and used a car in that crime.

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