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Ohio extends amnesty program for drivers with suspended licenses

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The Plain Dealer

Ohio Highway Patrol trooper John Williams holds the driver's license of a motorist he pulled over for speeding on the Ohio Turnpike, Wednesday, January 20, 2016.

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By [Peter Krouse, cleveland.com](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio – State lawmakers have extended until the end of the year a program designed to help low-income Ohioans regain their driving privileges after their licenses have been suspended.

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The program has helped more than 6,500 people with suspended licenses get back on the road since the program took effect Jan. 31, according to records given to [cleveland.com](#) by Greenspan.

[Cleveland.com](#)'s series, Justice For All, advocated in 2017 for Ohio to reform its practice of suspending drivers' licenses to compel people to pay fines and fees or to punish them for driving without insurance or for other reasons that have nothing to do with driving safety.

Last year, the legislation and then-Gov. John Kasich approved a pilot version of the amnesty program, which waives or reduces license-reinstatement fees for drivers who have lost their licenses for certain violations.

Many low-income drivers rack up reinstatement fees, sometimes totaling several thousand dollars, that they can afford to pay.

Driving without insurance is a common reason for a license being suspended, said Emanuella Groves, a Cleveland Municipal Court judge who has been leading efforts in Northeast Ohio to educate people about the amnesty program and to help them apply for participation.

In March, the municipal court held the first of several phone banks to educate the public and received more than 2,000 calls, she said.

The court also has held three in-person sessions attorneys and magistrates work with applicants to research their driving records, determine their eligibility and fill out BMV

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To be eligible for a reduction in fees, 18 months must have passed since an offender's court-ordered suspension has ended. But those who are indigent can apply immediately for a complete waiver of BMV fees. The definition of indigent is someone who receives food-stamp benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Statewide, more than 79,000 people have applied for amnesty so far, according to information provided to cleveland.com by Greenspan's office. Of those applicants, 5,493 received a complete waiver of their fees as of July 12 because they were deemed indigent. Another 65,444 had their fees reduced.

The program has resulted in 6,591 people becoming eligible to drive again and tens of thousands of others closer to having their privileges restored. Altogether, nearly \$60 million in fees have been eliminated.

To qualify for the amnesty program, an applicant must have satisfied all court-ordered obligations, except payment of reinstatement fees to the BMV, that related to the offense resulting in the license suspension.

Reinstatement fees connected with certain offenses, such as driving under the influence, are not eligible to be forgiven.

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Greenspan said Ohio has about one million suspended drivers and about 400,000 could qualify for relief through the amnesty program, which is why extending the program could continue to pay benefits.

In a related issue, Greenspan said he wants to review the more than 30 state offenses that can lead to suspension of a driver's license to see if some of them should be eliminated.

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