

## Showing a path for getting driver's license restored

By **Cindy Swirko**

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### Variety of agencies gather in Alachua County to help people get privileges restored

Losing a driver's license can be a hardship for people who have had their right to drive taken by the state.

A woman who would give only her middle name, Chantel, is one of them. She has a University of Florida Gator 1 card for bus service but doesn't feel comfortable taking her young child to daycare on the bus.

"I've been spending a lot of money on Uber. Round trip to get to the daycare is \$60," Chantel said. "My license has been suspended since August 2018. It's been expensive."

But a clinic Thursday sponsored by the Eighth Judicial Circuit helped a handful of people get their licenses back and set more than 100 others, including Chantel, on a path toward reinstatement.

Agencies that could help were gathered in the jury assembly room of the South Main Street courthouse to explain to people exactly why they lost their licenses and what they must do to get them back.

An administrative hearing officer was listening to cases, an assistant public defender had a table ready to assist and the Alachua County Clerk of the Court office waived collection fees — so only the fines needed to be paid.

"We see a lot of folks in the court system who don't have a license. They don't know why they don't have a license and they don't know how to fix not having a license," Alachua County Judge Kristine Van Vorst said. "This gets all of the

stakeholders in one room to get people answers to those questions...Everyone who is here can give guidance. Not everybody is going to walk out with a license but they will walk out with a path to getting it back.”

Data from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles shows that 6,509 county residents have their license suspended, revoked or cancelled.

The state pulls licenses for a variety of reasons including accumulating too many points for traffic offenses, failure to pay traffic tickets or child support, a lack of auto insurance or failure to renew car tags.

People designated as habitual traffic offenders can also lose their license as can people entering pleas to some alcohol or drug offenses.

State notices are sent to people who lose their license. But learning what it takes to get a license restored can be complex and a time-consuming shuffle to different agencies including the Alachua County Tax Collector, the public defender or state attorney, and the clerk of the court.

So Circuit Communications Coordinator Christy Cain organized Thursday's clinic with representatives from all of the relevant agencies. People had to sign up in advance and participation was capped at 130, though Cain said many more people tried to register.

The cases of participants were reviewed in advance so they could be directed to the agency that could best assist. For a lucky six, the state motor vehicle department had the equipment to issue new licenses on the spot to six people who had been cleared for reinstatement.

“The first man was great. It's been five years and he's been struggling with it. He was trying to get a job and they told him two weeks ago that he had to have a driver's license, so he was pretty rejected,” said Clerk of the Court Jess Irby. “He came down here to figure out what he needed to do, got it taken care of and got a fresh license printed. He was smiling ear to ear.”

Officials said they hope more clinics will be held, possibly yearly.