



# REDUCING POVERTY INCREASING JUSTICE

On the cover: OPLC Senior Policy Advocate Zack Eckles (back row, second from left) and OPLC Director Susan Jagers (back row, far left) witness Gov. Mike DeWine sign House Bill 29 into law during an official ceremony at the State Capitol.

# MISSION STATEMENT

To reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.



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Danielle DeLeon Spires, Policy Advocate

Zack Eckles, Senior Policy Advocate

Tim Johnson, Senior Policy Advocate

## FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR



Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on 2024, I am proud to highlight the Ohio Poverty Law Center's remarkable advocacy efforts that have driven real, lasting change for Ohioans. This year, we dismantled barriers that kept people from accessing employment, education, and financial stability—securing legislative victories that will have a profound impact on communities across our state.

Among our key victories, OPLC played a pivotal role in the passage of House Bill 29, which eliminates debt-related driver's license suspensions. For years, these suspensions trapped thousands of Ohioans in a cycle of poverty that barred them from quality employment and economic opportunities. By leading a broad coalition and mobilizing advocates, we helped make Ohio the 25th state to move away from debt-based penalties—protecting the driving privileges and financial independence of countless individuals. Beyond legislative victories, 2024 marked 15 years of OPLC's dedicated advocacy. At our Justice on Tap celebration, we gathered with partners and supporters to reflect on our progress and reaffirm our commitment to justice. The event raised more than \$11,500 to sustain our work—fueling the fight for economic security and fairness.

**Thank you for standing with us.** Your support strengthens our mission to reduce poverty and increase justice in Ohio. Together, we are making a difference.

With gratitude,

Alicia Williamson

Board Chair, Ohio Poverty Law Center

**August 2, 2018** - Governor John Kasich signs HB 336, creating a six-month temporary driver's license reinstatement fee amnesty.

During the temporary program, OPLC's *Moving Forward* report found that 76,669 individuals were served and saved \$63 million in reinstatement fees.

**June 16, 2020** - Governor Mike DeWine signs HB 285

**June 12, 2019** - House Bill 285 is introduced to make the program permanent.

**January 31, 2023** - Senate Bill 37 to limit driver's license suspensions to offenses related to unsafe driving is introduced.

A report from the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland found that Ohio drivers face over 3 million debt-related suspensions annually.

Legal aids held clinics statewide, partnering with community and government organizations to help clients take advantage of the temporary program.

**May 22, 2024** - Ohio Senate approves Senate Bill 37.

**May 23, 2023** - OPLC releases *Clearing the Road for Ohioans with Suspended Licenses: A Look at Ohio's Reinstatement Fee Amnesty Program*.

More than 222,000 Ohioans save an average of \$612 in reinstatement fees in the first.

**December 18, 2024** - House Bill 29, to limit when a driver's license can be suspended for not paying child support, is amended to include Senate Bill 37 and clears the Senate.

**January 8, 2025** - Governor Mike DeWine signs House Bill 29, which goes into effect in April 2025.

# Advocacy Leads to Law that Curbs Debt-Related License Suspensions

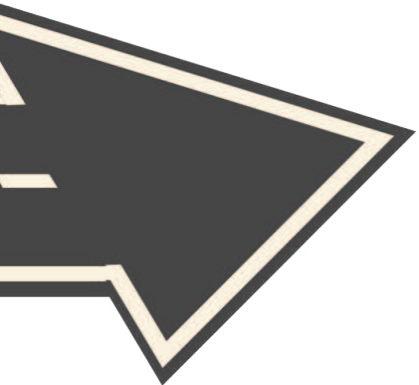
Legislation that removes many of the financial barriers that lead to driver's license suspensions was signed by Governor Mike DeWine on January 8, 2025. With the adoption of House Bill 29, Ohio became the 25th state to move away from debt-related penalties.

OPLC led a large and diverse coalition of advocates and impacted Ohioans who supported the legislation over the last two years. Throughout the Senate and House committee process, nearly 40 witnesses—ranging from legal aid societies, employment advocates and business leaders to conservative and taxpayer groups—submitted proponent testimony.

Thanks to the advocacy of coalition partners, the bill will help Ohioans by:

- Eliminating the driver's license suspension for failure to pay a court fine or fee.
- Removing license suspensions for failure to pay a court fine or fee retroactively and without reinstatement fees.
- Removing the possible penalty of a driver's license suspension for a drug abuse offense, unless the offender caused others to use, manufacture, or traffic or if they used a vehicle to further the commission of the offense.
- Reducing the lookback period for driving without insurance offenses to be considered repeat offenses from five years to one year.
- Eliminating school truancy as a reason for license denial or suspension.
- Authorizing a person whose driver's license is suspended for failure to pay child support to request limited driving privileges from a court in all circumstances, not just during contempt proceedings as under previous law.

For years, debt-related driver's license suspensions blocked thousands of Ohioans from finding stable jobs and businesses from accessing quality talent. House Bill 29 removes these unnecessary barriers to employment and hiring—a significant win for businesses and communities. This legislation will help keep Ohioans on the road, bolster the state's workforce, and break costly cycles of poverty and punishment.



# Problematic School Discipline Bill Improved by OPLC and Legal Aid Advocacy

Knowing that time spent in the classroom is the greatest predictor of school success, OPLC has always supported policies that make it harder to suspend or expel students from school. When House Bill 206—which would give superintendents broad authority to expel students—was introduced in 2023 it raised immediate concerns.

While the bill passed and was signed into law by the Governor, our advocacy added safeguards to protect students' rights.

Through meetings with the bill sponsor and committee members and testimony before House and Senate committees, several of our requested amendments were included in the final version.

Our suggested changes better defined when a student can be expelled, clarified who would be responsible for the cost of required behavioral health evaluations, and ensured due process rights for students.

With concerns about the disparate impact of discipline on students of color and students with disabilities and those living in low-income households, we advocated for a requirement that demographic data on expelled students be reported to the Department of Education and Workforce.



Senior Policy Advocate Tim Johnson testifies before the Senate Education Committee.

# “Pay Stub Protection Act” Enacted



**K**nowing that Ohioans need paystubs to rent apartments, apply for benefits, and ensure their wages are accurate, we were happy to advocate for and testify in support of House Bill 106. Deemed the “Pay Stub Protection Act,” the bill requires employers to provide earnings and deductions statements to each employee.

The bill was signed by Governor Mike DeWine on January 8 and is effective April 9, 2025.

Under the bill, an employer must provide each employee with a written or electronic statement or access to a statement of the employee’s earnings and deductions for each pay period on the employer’s regular paydays.

“When a worker lacks proof of income, securing everything from a car loan to an apartment may be off the table. Meanwhile, safety net programs exclude workers who can’t prove they are working.”

OPLC Policy Advocate Danielle DeLeon Spires in testimony provided to the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee

“Ohio is currently one of only nine states where an employer can legally choose not to provide their employees with a statement detailing their pay information. With the passage of this bill, employees could ensure that they are paid an adequate wage for their hours worked and have access to the documentation that proves it.”

Bill Sponsor Rep. Dontavius Jarrells in testimony before the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee.



## OPLC Legacy Celebrated, Money Raised at “Justice on Tap”

**O**n September 12, 2024, we celebrated 15 years of advocacy to support low-income Ohioans who are living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

We had a great turnout from friends, partners, and supporters from all parts of the state! The energy in the room was palpable as we gathered to support our collective mission and work to reduce poverty and increase justice.

From sponsorship, ticket sales, a 50/50 raffle, and wine pull, we netted more than \$11,500 to support our work.

Board Chair, Alicia Williamson spoke about OPLC’s work, thanked our guests, and noted that they were “part of a movement that’s creating real change for people who need it most.”

OPLC Board Chair Alicia Williamson welcomes guests to the event.



OPLC Board Members




Current and former OPLC staff


OPLC's first Board Chair, Jon Marshall, and first Director, Gene King



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1108 City Park Ave., Suite 200  
Columbus, OH 43206

[www.ohiopovertylawcenter.org](http://www.ohiopovertylawcenter.org)