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A non-profit law firm and community education organization helping low and moderate income people in Kansas



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Kansas Drivers License Suspensions: Get Help to Get Reinstated

From KAKE News in Wichita.

An out of control epidemic...

...that's what some people are calling the number of Kansans with suspended drivers licenses.

KAKE News Investigates (in Wichita) showed how easily simple speeding or parking tickets can turn into lifelong debt for some Kansans.

Updated numbers from the Kansas Department of Revenue show that more than 213,000 Kansans have suspended licenses, about half of them from Sedgwick County and the City of Wichita.

So what can you do to avoid the trap?

Local police and traffic court judges across the state say finding someone with a suspended license behind the wheel is a regular occurrence. Partially because there are just so many with suspended licenses. Just as often, the drivers say it's because they couldn't afford the original ticket, needed to keep working to pay the bills, and didn't know they had any options.

"Then trying to get things straightened out is difficult," said former traffic court judge Phil Journey. "It takes specific knowledge that many people simply don't have and don't know how to find out."

While the various options are quite complicated, Maize Police Sergeant Brandon Stitt says there are two pieces of advice that can prevent a single traffic violation from spiraling out of control.

"That is key," Stitt said. "Number one make sure your address is current. Number two, communicate."

"First of all, call us," said Sarah Javier, the Maize Municipal Court Clerk. "Contact us. Most of

the people who have 30 day letters, get suspended licenses, they don't actually contact the court."

Javier says the sooner the better when it comes to making that all. Don't wait more than a day or two after the ticket.

"We're more willing to work with you if you call before your court date," she added. "If you call 5 minutes before court starts I really can't do a whole lot for you."

Javier says good communication can help you set up a payment plan to get rid of that expensive ticket. It can even help if you have to miss a payment.

And, under a new state law this year, the judge can even waive the fees and late charges on a ticket in cases where the defendant has proved the cost would be a "manifest hardship" on them or their family.

"If you can't make a payment you can't make a payment. And the judge will typically understand that," Stitt said.

Another reason to call quickly?

Just how long you have can vary. While the court date is typically about 30 days after you got the ticket, like in Maize, in cities like Wichita it's just ten days.

And, though most courts will send multiple warnings, they need your current address if you're going to get the warning. So, if the address on your driver's license is wrong when you get the ticket, tell the officer.

And if you move before paying off the ticket, tell the court first then change the address with the Department of Revenue.

In Maize, "you have approximately 60 days from the time that you're issued the citation before any kind of action against your drivers license is taken," Stitt said.

After the state suspends your license, things get even more complicated. But you still have options once the original ticket is taken care of. Then you may be able to apply for a restricted license to get to work or a moped license until the suspension is cleared.

Getting the suspension lifted will likely cost extra money and you have to apply through the Kansas Department of Revenue. Don't count on the local court where you paid your ticket to take care of that for you.

You can get help to deal with license suspension from Kansas Legal Services -- [apply for help here](#).

Wichita has the worst problem with license suspension in the state.

According to the Department of Revenue, as of October 2019, there were 213,544 driver's

licenses suspended in Kansas. However, even though Wichita has only 13% of the State population, in an effort to force poor people to pay high traffic fines and fees, their Municipal Court judges have suspended the license of 51,400 drivers or 24% of all suspensions in Kansas.

Black drivers in Wichita are twice as likely to get a traffic ticket to pay as White drivers. Given historical data going back decades, this is likely the case in most jurisdictions in Kansas and across the USA. Blacks are also issued more than one violation per stop which is not the case for tickets issued to White drivers.

Since the whole purpose of issuing tickets is to supposedly improve driving behavior to prevent traffic accidents, this data analysis verifies that Blacks in Wichita were involved in 19% of the accidents while White and Hispanic drivers accounted for 78% of traffic accidents.

So, Black drivers are just as likely to get into an accident as White drivers BUT are still twice as likely to get a ticket and with more than one violation cited. Black drivers are also given a disproportionate number of non-moving violation fines and fees to pay which have nothing to do with safe driving behavior.

The Racial Profiling Advisory Board of Wichita has a website to help Black and Hispanic drivers in Wichita get help with suspended drivers licenses.

Get Reinstated

To check the status of your Kansas Driver's License—**[click here](#)**.

If necessary, you may want to hire an attorney to help you get your license reinstated.

Apply to **Kansas Legal Services**, to help with suspended license cases.

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