



***Jim Howell***  
***Commissioner – Fifth District***  
***Board of County Commissioners***  
***Sedgwick County, Kansas***

Date: February 11, 2021

To: Chair Proehl, House Committee on Transportation

Re: Testimony Supporting HB 2193

From: Jim Howell, Sedgwick County Commissioner, Fifth District

Chairman Proehl, and Members of the Committee,

I wish to submit testimony in support of HB 2193. This bill will help address the enormous number of suspended drivers' licenses in Kansas by reducing automatic suspension periods, narrowing the situations in which suspension periods might stack up, and reducing financial barriers that prevent drivers from reacquiring legal driving privileges.

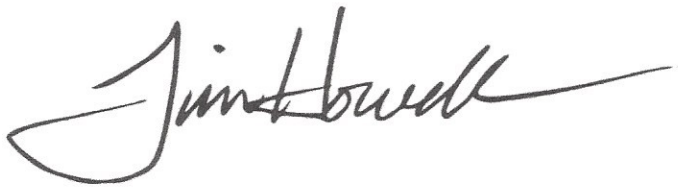
In late 2019, KAKE reported that there were more than 213,000 suspended drivers' licenses in Kansas and that about half of those suspended drivers resided in Sedgwick County (<https://tinyurl.com/suspended-drivers>). Thus, according to some estimates, more than 20% of Sedgwick County drivers have their licenses suspended. It is reasonable to assume this problem has only worsened as the Kansas economy endures the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet we all know that one-fifth of Sedgwick County's residents are not waiting at home for their suspensions to expire. More than likely, out of desperation and lack of alternatives, most suspended drivers are continuing to drive, and I speculate that most of them probably do not have current auto insurance. In large cities, public transportation options are prevalent but that is not a viable option for most suspended drivers in Kansas.

Some drivers may rack up traffic infraction fines that become financially overwhelming. If they fail to pay their fine on time and fail to appear in court just once, KDOR suspends their license. Further, a parent that fails to pay their child-support tasks may have their drivers' license suspended by KDOR law as punishment to get the parent to stay responsible. Then, it just takes one traffic stop while driving on a suspended license for things to escalate. Fines, reinstatement fees, and mandatory suspension periods can be insurmountable for regular citizens. Yes, these people are making bad choices, but the penalties increase rapidly and become nearly impossible to solve.

I am not making excuses for the bad decisions but I can understand the plight these people are trying to overcome. For example, the statutory minimum fines for Driving While Suspended can range from \$100 all the way to \$1,500, and that bad choice alone also automatically adds another 90 days to their suspension period. Moreover, this 90-day suspension period only begins to run once they settle all outstanding fines and other impediments to their valid driver's license. Many of these people cannot reasonably pay their fines because they cannot get to work, struggle to put food on the table for their family, or pay child support. If the person succumbs to these pressures, they might make a very bad choice to drive on a suspended license. If they are caught, the penalties become overlapping and exponential. Many will never drive legally again.

As the Legislature discusses criminal justice reform, addressing the enormous number of suspended licenses in Kansas is low-hanging fruit. HB 2193 is a step in the right direction. Please find a way to give grace to citizens when appropriate so they can keep their jobs, support their children, and keep the lights on and food on the table. Help them legally keep their jobs so that they can pay their fines and child-support. The law in its current form may have been well-intentioned, but with more than 20% of Sedgwick County's drivers on suspended licenses, it is time make this punitive law more effective. HB 2193 does just that.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jim Howell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.