



NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Drivers Since 1982

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Testimony for the Senate Appropriations Committee On HB 5414, June 11, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, the National Motorists Association (NMA) supports this bill.

That said, we want to clearly state this bill is seriously incomplete. It is neither fair nor honorable to allow any of these cruel fees to be imposed for three more long years.

HB5414 does not go far enough, or fast enough, to rid Michigan of the terrible consequences of the Driver Responsibility Fees Act (DRA) that should never have been passed in the first place in 2003. The NMA testified against passage of the original bill that enacted the fees. We knew the true purpose and actual result would be about money, not safety, and experience has proven this true for many years.

The 2008 Senate Fiscal Agency analysis showed the fees had not reduced serious offenses, as was falsely promised by the original bill supporters. The DRA never achieved greater safety, only roughly half the fees assessed are collected, and the law destroyed the financial lives of perhaps as many as 400,000 lower income citizens of every race, ethnic background, and area of residence in our state. Most people in arrears on DRA fees just become unlicensed and uninsured drivers that have to drive in order to live and feed their families.

At a hearing about repeal of this terrible law in 2006, then-Representative Tom Casperson said: "*I apologize for what the Legislature has done*". Then-Representative Pearce apologized for "*creating a monster we need to fix*." Judge Buhl delayed a murder trial to attend and plead for repeal. Two other judges and several legislators since have likened the DRA to a *debtor's prison* – an unacceptable type of punishment that most of the civilized world got rid of over a hundred years ago. Many legislators who voted for the original law later said they would have voted no if they had known the terrible consequences which would result. Secretary of State Ruth Johnson has always opposed the fees. She knows they are about money, not safety.

For the last several years, pieces of the DRA have been eased or repealed in closed back room negotiations between legislative leaders and the Governor's office. The negotiations have focused not on what is right or wrong, but on how much of the wrongful DRA revenue the leaders would agree to give up that year ... if any.

The fair and honorable new law would be a total end to all new DRA fees in 2014, plus a generous amnesty plan to allow drivers to settle their debts in full by paying off 50% of the arrears over a five to ten year payment period with immediate drivers license reinstatement for a small fee.

History says this will not be the bill that passes, but it would be the fair and honorable thing to do. So far, money has stopped efforts for immediate repeal. Is there any chance for fairness to win in 2014?

Thank you and I would be happy to take any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

James C. Walker, for the National Motorists Association