

**Statement on behalf of the
American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia
before the
D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Hearings for
B26-572, the “Child Support Improvement Amendment Act of 2026”
and
B26-480, the “Ensuring Access and Supporting Engagement (EASE) for DOC residents
Act of 2025”
By
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Chair Pinto and members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing on two very important matters that impact the lives of District residents. The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia (ACLU-D.C.).

ACLU-D.C. advocates for sensible, evidence-based public policy solutions that safeguard fundamental liberties and rights of District residents. ACLU-D.C. also believes that a safer D.C. is one where individuals, families, and communities have the resources to meet their needs. The following testimony is in support of B26-572, the “Child Support Improvement Amendment Act of 2026” and B26-480, the “Ensuring Access and Supporting Engagement (EASE) for DOC residents Act of 2025”. B26-572 would ensure that all child support payments go directly to the families on whose behalf they are collected, helping to shore up financial resources for children. B26-480 would ensure that D.C. residents incarcerated at D.C. Department of Corrections facilities have opportunities to engage in the local legislative process, which directly impacts them.

I. B26-572, the “Child Support Improvement Amendment Act of 2026”

B26-572 would make important reforms to D.C.’s child support collection system—namely, a full pass-through of all child support collections to families that also received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.¹ Currently, a portion of child support

¹ B26-572, <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B26-0572>.

payments collected on behalf of low income families is retained by D.C. and the federal government because the child support system prioritizes paying itself back first. As a result, families currently receiving, or that have previously received, TANF do not get their full child support payments. As Councilmember Pinto stated during the March 18th hearing, federal law permits the District to pass through the entirety of the child support payment collected directly to families.² ACLU-D.C. supports this measure because it would help reduce poverty for some children whose families are entangled in the child support system.³

Research shows that investing directly in families helps them achieve financial stability, enriches children’s learning environment, and contributes to safer neighborhoods and communities.⁴ Similarly, research shows that when child support payments go directly to families, children benefit from increased household income, greater parental involvement, and improved child development outcomes.⁵ In that vein, ACLU-D.C. supports limiting the use of license suspensions as a mechanism for enforcing child support payments.

Besides being an inefficient means for enforcing collection of fines and fees, debt-based license suspension policies create more harm than good—especially when jurisdictions depend on those fines and fees as revenue streams.⁶

The suspension of or inability to obtain driver's, occupational, or professional licenses criminalizes poverty and exacerbates the wealth gap between Black and white District residents. Losing a driver’s license, for example, can result in a lack of reliable transportation for day-to-day errands, such as grocery runs and medical appointments, but also for getting to and from work. Unreliable transportation creates barriers to acquiring and holding on to a stable job. Some jobs are not accessible by public transit, so a person must drive to work. Without stable employment, it is more difficult for a person to maintain an income to be able to pay off fines and fees, or child support in this context. Together, these consequences limit opportunities for employment and financial stability, and harm children whose parents are unable to work.⁷

² March 18, 2026 Judiciary Committee public hearing on B26-572

https://dc.granicus.com/player/clip/10419?view_id=2&redirect=true.

³ Child poverty disproportionately impacts Black children in D.C. Compared to 1 in 100 white, no Hispanic children, nearly 1 in 3 Black children in D.C. live in poverty. <https://dcfpi.org/all/dc-contentends-with-extreme-child-poverty-disparities-by-race-place-and-age-2/>.

⁴ ACLU-D.C. report on building safety through resources, <https://www.acludc.org/app/uploads/2025/10/2025-ACLU-D.C.-Report-Building-Safety-Through-Resources.pdf>.

⁵ Office of Child Support Enforcement report, https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/sbtn_csp_is_a_good_investment.pdf.

⁶ Tax Policy Center report on Fines and Fees, <https://taxpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/FINES-FEES-AND-FINANCIAL-STRAIN.pdf>.

⁷ Fine and Fess Justice Center on Debt-based license suspension, <https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/articles/debt-based-license-suspensions-drivers-of-poverty-and-incarceration/>.

Additionally, because fines and fees function like a regressive tax,⁸ wealthier residents can simply pay off fines and fees, and they also do not have to dedicate the same portion of their income to do so. By contrast, a person with limited to no income not only has to put a higher portion of their income to pay fine and fess, they may not be able to pay it at all, which may add additional penalties, and therefore risks facing more dire consequences.

One potential dire consequence is increased interaction with police, particularly for Black men, who are already over-policed. Police can identify unpaid fines and fees with license plate readers and can use enforcement of missed payments to justify pretextual stops. At best, these stops result in additional fines for drivers who may already be struggling to pay original fines. At worst, these encounters can escalate to violence or death, as we have seen in this country for decades.

Such was the case of Daunte Wright, a then-20-year-old, unarmed young Black man in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center.⁹ Wright was apparently stopped for a minor traffic violation. Upon running his plates, officers on the scene allegedly found that Wright had unpaid fines and fees. Shortly after, he was shot by then-officer Kimberly Potter and later died on the scene.^{10,11}

Debt-based license suspensions are counterproductive and, in some cases, extremely harmful. They often create barriers to meeting financial responsibilities, such as payment of child support, especially for individuals already experiencing poverty. The impact of such suspensions, or the inability to obtain a license to begin with, cannot be overstated; it causes harm to children by not meeting their basic needs, and can also put parents' lives at risk. ACLU-D.C. urges the Council to pass B26-572.

II. B26-480, the “Ensuring Access and Supporting Engagement (EASE) for DOC residents Act of 2025”

ACLU-D.C. supports B26-480.¹² If passed, this bill would codify the ability of individuals incarcerated in D.C. Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities to testify before the D.C. Council. It would also allow them to engage with their Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANC). The bill would require DOC to provide access to electronic devices and internet service for residents in its custody, eliminate cost barriers by providing no-cost methods for mailing testimony and correspondence to the Council, and would mandate that

⁸ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, <https://itep.org/why-local-jurisdictions-heavy-reliance-on-fines-and-fees-is-a-tax-policy-issue/>.

⁹⁹ <https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/new-aclu-report-finds-debt-based-drivers-license-suspension-laws-impose-harm-and-waste-resources>.

¹⁰ In December 2021, Kim Porter was found guilty of and convicted for first- and second-degree manslaughter charges in the killing of Wright. <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/23/1066012247/kim-potter-trial-daunte-wright>.

¹¹ <https://abcnews.com/US/police-shooting-daunte-wright-timeline-case/story?id=77094572>.

¹² B26-480, <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B26-0480>.

DOC establish processes and policies related to these civic engagement opportunities, including providing educational materials about residents' ability to participate.

This legislation is long overdue. D.C. made major strides by passing the Restore the Vote Amendment Act, which re-enfranchised D.C. residents who are incarcerated, allowing them to vote.¹³ However, there are still barriers to direct engagement with the legislative process, like testifying at Council hearings, for example. DOC currently has over 2,100 D.C. residents in its custody. Although the ANC for that population can provide some insight into the goings-on in DOC facilities, it is hard for them to capture and represent everyone's experiences and perspectives, as noted by Harold Cunningham, the current ANC 7F08 Commissioner.¹⁴ It is critical that people in DOC facilities, whose lives are often dictated at the whim of those outside the facility and a system they have no control over, at least have the opportunity to share their own stories. This is especially important because often times, the Council and the public only get one perspective of things happening inside the D.C. Jail and other DOC facilities—from the director. B26-480 would give residents in DOC custody opportunities to more fully engage with the democratic process, and for the Council and public to get a fuller picture of conditions at DOC facilities¹⁵

In 2023, ACLU-D.C. and more than 60 organizations and District residents signed on to a letter by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs asking DOC Director Thomas Faust and the D.C. Council to create a process for direct access and participation in D.C. Council hearings.¹⁶ This legislation would finally allow DOC residents with invaluable insights to positively impact the legislative process in D.C. We urge the Council to support and enact this critical legislation.

Conclusion

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of these important matters. ACLU-D.C. stands ready as a partner to continue working together toward a better D.C.

¹³ D.C. Law 23-277. Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2020,

<https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/23-277>.

¹⁴ Mr. Cunningham testified virtually during the March 18th public hearing.

¹⁵ D.C. DOC Official Population Counts by Facility, (as of Mar. 6, 2026),

<https://lims.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/60755/Introduction/B26-0480-Introduction.pdf?Id=227308>

¹⁶ Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs letter,

<https://www.washlaw.org/supporting-access-to-dc-council-hearings-while-incarcerated/>