

Legislation Text

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Urging the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to enact an amnesty program for the Traffic Court of Philadelphia whereby drivers who have lost their driving privileges for failure to pay outstanding traffic violations can have those privileges restored upon payment in full of all outstanding traffic fines, and applauding the leadership of Senator Mike Stack in authoring legislation to authorize the establishment of such an amnesty program.

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania continue to face unprecedented financial challenges arising out of our nation's ongoing financial crisis, placing even greater importance on collecting delinquent sums owed to the City; and

WHEREAS, There are currently 847,001 unpaid traffic tickets issued by the Traffic Court of Philadelphia and the total owed on these tickets is \$177,712,441.00. Of the total owed on unpaid traffic tickets, \$20,000,000.00 [so as not to start a sentence with a dollar figure] are in an active installment payment plan, leaving \$157,712,441.00 in delinquent status; and

WHEREAS, Approximately one third of these unpaid traffic tickets were issued in the last three years, with a total delinquency of \$43,465,225.00 and approximately two thirds of the unpaid tickets are older than three years, with a total delinquency of \$134,247,216.00; and

WHEREAS, When an individual fails to pay an outstanding traffic ticket, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) assesses points against the individual's driving record. When those points exceed a certain amount, PennDOT must automatically suspend driving privileges. The assessed points also result in an increase to that person's automobile insurance premiums; and

WHEREAS, The payment of all outstanding traffic violations does not affect the length of time of a driver's license suspension or the amount of points assessed against a driver's record because each driver's license suspension must remain in effect until the expiration of the suspension period. When a long suspension has been imposed, there is no incentive on the part of a driver to pay outstanding traffic citations, since that person's driving privileges will remain suspended despite the payment in full of all outstanding traffic fines, even if the traffic fines remain unpaid; and

WHEREAS, Amnesty programs, which authorize a person's driving privileges to be reinstated and points eliminated upon payment in full of all outstanding fines, have proven successful around the nation in collecting significant sums of outstanding fines. In the first week of March, 2011, the City of Jackson, Mississippi collected \$316,365.74 in a two day traffic ticket amnesty. Other communities which have successfully implemented traffic ticket amnesty programs include Las Vegas, Atlanta and Nashville; and

WHEREAS, State Senator Mike Stack is planning to reintroduce legislation establishing a 120 day amnesty program for the Traffic Court of Philadelphia, whereby drivers who have had their driving privileges suspended can have their driving privileges reinstated or the length of the suspension reduced upon payment of all outstanding traffic violations. The amnesty would not apply to drivers convicted of offenses involving driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, homicide by vehicle, aggravated assault by vehicle, accidents

involving death, personal injury or damage to vehicles or other property; and

WHEREAS, An amnesty program, along the lines of the legislation to be introduced by State Senator Stack, would provide our City with critical funds from the collection of outstanding traffic violations and restore the ability of those persons paying delinquent traffic citations to once again exercise their driving privileges; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF PHILADELPHIA, That this Council urges the Pennsylvania General Assembly to enact an amnesty program for the Traffic Court of Philadelphia whereby drivers who have lost their driving privileges for failure to pay outstanding traffic violations can have those privileges restored upon payment in full of all outstanding traffic fines. The amnesty program should exempt drivers convicted of felony offenses involving driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, homicide by vehicle, aggravated assault by vehicle and also accidents involving death, personal injury or damage to vehicles or other property.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this Council applauds the leadership of Senator Mike Stack in authoring legislation to authorize the establishment of such an amnesty program.