Forty-three states and the District of Columbia suspend millions of drivers’ licenses for non-payment of traffic violations as well as other criminal justice debts—even if you cannot afford to pay the fine. In many states, driving with a suspended license is misdemeanor offense that can lead to a criminal conviction, violation of probation or parole, and additional fines and fees.

Reinstating a suspended driver’s license can be an onerous process. Many states keep a suspension in place until you have either made full payment on your all criminal justice debts owed to the state or entered into a payment plan to do so. Some states also charge an additional reinstatement fee.

Contact the Department of Motor Vehicles in your state to find out what criminal justice debts resulted in your license being suspended and how to go about getting the license reinstated. Using this information, contact they appropriate court or state agency to whom the debt is owed. Ask how much you owe and whether you are eligible for a payment plan or payment alternatives like community service. If interest was accruing on the debt while you were incarcerated, you may ask to have the interest charges waived.

If your court debt is related to probation, parole, or a suspended jail sentence, you may want to check with a criminal defense attorney before contacting the court on your own. Although unlikely, it is possible that contacting the court about unpaid court debt could lead the court to take enforcement action against you.

Source: National Consumer Law Center, Surviving Debt [50th NCLC Anniversary Edition], updated at www.nclc.org/library
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