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ADVOCATES CELEBRATE VICTORY IN EFFORT TO REFORM CHICAGO'S TICKET AND COLLECTIONS PRACTICES

CHICAGO -- Chicago City Council has passed an ordinance with a vote of 49-1, O2019-5547, which is a first step towards reforming tickets, payment plans, and ticket debt collections related to non-driving violations in the City of Chicago. Reforms to the city's fines and fees system are urgent: Northern Illinois is the national capital for Chapter 13 Bankruptcies, due largely to Chicago's aggressive and racially disproportionate ticketing and collections processes. This finding is explored in great depth in the Driven into Debt series by ProPublica Illinois and WBEZ, which has helped raise public awareness and frustration about excessive ticketing and collections in Chicago.

Sponsored by Mayor Lightfoot, Clerk Valencia, Alderwoman Dowell (3), Alderman Scott (24), Alderman Villegas (36), and Alderman Waguespack (32), the ordinance effectively ends driver's license suspensions for parking and compliance ticket debts in Chicago. The ordinance also reduces late fees for city sticker tickets from \$200 to \$50, reinstates a 15-day grace period for renewing stickers, and restructures the City's ticket payment plans, offering lower down payments and extending the time to pay back debt for individuals facing hardship.

"Across the state, we estimate that 400 people lose their jobs every week due to non-moving license suspensions, and Chicago is ground zero for these suspensions," said Transit Table spokesperson and Chicago Jobs Council Policy & Communications Associate Eric Halvorson. "We talk about a suspension of your license as a suspension of your life because it undermines everything you and your family are trying to do, including paying off the debts that got us here."

In Chicago, those suspensions pile on top of huge ticket debts, racially disproportionate ticketing, and draconian debt collection practices, which heavily burden communities of color and low-income neighborhoods where people are working extremely hard to make ends meet.”

Additionally, the ordinance allows anyone whose vehicle is booted the ability to request a 24-hour extension to pay their fines in full or start a payment plan before their vehicle is towed, as well as preparations for a city sticker amnesty period within the year.

For over three years, the Transit Table coalition has led the charge to end driver’s license suspensions for non-moving violations in Illinois through reforms, such as those in the ordinance. Using license suspensions to collect on ticket debt contributes to a destructive cycle of debt, unemployment, and poverty. We celebrate this significant move forward and recommit to continue working for equity across all Chicago’s fines, fees, and debt collection practices. This work has also been supported and enabled by the Chicago Fines, Fees & Access Collaborative, convened by City Clerk Valencia, where many of the Transit Table advocates also participate.

This ordinance adds urgency to the need for statewide reforms, laying the groundwork for Chicago to comply with the License to Work Act (SB 1786, Aquino/ Ammons), which will end the practice of driver’s license suspension for nonpayment of parking and compliance tickets and a host of other non-moving violations in Illinois. We expect a final vote on the License to Work Act in the fall veto session of the state legislature, and we applaud the Mayor for supporting this important state legislation.

For individuals interested in making phone calls in support of the License to Work Act, phone banking is taking place at the Chicago Jobs Council, 29 East Madison Street Suite 1700, on Thursday 9/26 between the hours of 3pm and 8pm.

The Transit Table is a coalition of Illinois social service providers, advocates, and other stakeholders working to eliminate transportation barriers that keep people out of work and in poverty. Among the Transit Table members are:

ACLU of Illinois
Americans for Prosperity– Illinois
Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice
Chicago Jobs Council
Chicago Urban League
Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights
Revolution Workshop
Woodstock Institute

For additional questions, contact Eric Halvorson, Chicago Jobs Council, at eric@cjcn.net or 312-255-0436.