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Sent: Tuesday, February 24, 2015 11:35 AM

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Subject: Gov. Shumlin & State's Attorney Donovan Announce Driver Restoration Day Pilot in Burlington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 24, 2015

Gov. Shumlin & State's Attorney Donovan Announce Driver Restoration Day Pilot in Burlington

Driver Restoration Day to be Held on March 20th

BURLINGTON – Gov. Peter Shumlin and Chittenden County State's Attorney TJ Donovan today announced a pilot Driver Restoration Day to be held in Burlington on March 20th to help Vermonters in Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Washington counties who have had their licenses suspended for failure to pay traffic tickets get their driving privileges reinstated. The effort is aimed at ensuring lower-income Vermonters are not forced to make choices between paying for overdue tickets or daily necessities and increasing public safety.

About 22,000 Vermonters have their license suspended for failure to pay overdue traffic fees and fines. Because many Vermonters are compelled to drive to earn a living, the inability or failure to pay initial traffic tickets can lead to additional tickets, a cycle that can quickly make paying outstanding fines and fees extremely unaffordable. Eventually this can result in a criminal suspension of an individual's license. This situation disproportionately affects lower income Vermonters who often struggle to pay traffic fines and contributes to the cycle of poverty, unemployment, and incarceration.

"No one is served by a system where Vermonters who cannot afford to pay traffic tickets are faced with the decision of breaking the law, and risking increased fines, in order to drive to work to earn a living," said Gov. Shumlin. "We want Vermonters licensed, insured, and working, not stuck in a cycle of ballooning fees and fines that they'll never be able to pay."

To help address this issue, the Governor and State's Attorney Donovan, in conjunction with low-income advocates, will hold a Driver Restoration Day on March 20th at Costello Courthouse in Burlington. Through cooperation with other State's Attorneys, residents of Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Washington counties with delinquent traffic tickets will be able to pay a percentage of what they owe for outstanding tickets and get their license reinstated. The goal is to provide a single place where Vermonters will be able to work out agreements with the State's Attorney and the Judicial Bureau that will allow them to return to legal driving.

In addition to helping lower-income residents in the participating counties get their license reinstated, the pilot Driver Restoration Day will help increase public safety by helping to make sure more drivers are insured. Because a valid driver's license is required to purchase auto

insurance, Vermonters driving with an expired license are most likely driving without proper auto insurance, putting other drivers and public safety at risk.

“About 22,000 Vermonters are delinquent on their traffic tickets,” said Chittenden County State’s Attorney TJ Donovan. “This is a public safety issue. By getting people reinstatement ready, we will enhance our public safety by allowing people to drive legally and to be fully insured. We are giving people an opportunity for a clean slate to get licensed and insured to lessen the economic hardship many are facing.”

The Governor noted that this pilot complements important legislation from the past two legislative sessions, spearheaded in part by Representative Maxine Grad following the work of the Non-Violent Misdemeanor Study Committee, which allows eligible Vermonters with suspended licenses to work out agreements through Court Diversion to allow for either a reduction in fines, or community service in exchange for a reduction in fines.

Christopher Curtis, staff attorney for Vermont Legal Aid and Co-Chair of the Governor’s Pathways from Poverty Council noted that the Council’s latest annual report to Governor Shumlin identified license suspension as a significant barrier to economic advancement for Vermonters who find themselves unable to pay these fines. Curtis said that almost 40% of Reach Up families identify transportation as a primary barrier to success - he said many of them cannot afford to pay ticket fines and end up being unable to drive.

“For many families on public assistance, a \$200 ticket might as well be \$2,000; they simply cannot afford to pay,” said Christopher Curtis. “This initiative represents a bold step forward to address the ‘poverty trap’ set by inability to pay civil ticket fines. This is a good deal for low-income families and for Vermont. It ensures reciprocity based on ability to pay, it gets people operating by the rules of the road, and it moves families out of poverty by ensuring Vermonters can get back to work.”

The March 20th Driver Restoration Day pilot will be held in Burlington and residents of Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Washington counties will be able to participate. The Governor said he hopes the pilot day will be a success so that similar Driver Restoration Days can be held in other counties throughout the state. The Governor said that his administration would work with State’s Attorneys, members of his Pathways from Poverty Council, the Judicial Bureau, Court Diversion, and others to expand upon successes from the initial pilot.

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