



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice  
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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**FULL SPEED AHEAD: A License Restoration Fair**

**Over 300 Essex County Residents Participate in Driver's License Fair  
Convened by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice**

Newark, NJ – The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice ([www.njisj.org](http://www.njisj.org)), a Newark-based research and advocacy organization, convened a three hour “License Restoration Fair” today, held at Essex County College, to help New Jersey residents address driver’s license suspensions. The event was free and open to the public, and attracted over three hundred participants.

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**WHAT:** “Full Speed Ahead,” a driver’s license restoration fair, allowed participants to connect *individuals seeking to restore their licenses with the various resources in Essex County* – to apply for assistance as well as receive tips and materials for negotiating the judicial and administrative process on their own behalf.

**WHO:** New Jersey Institute for Social Justice in partnership with the Essex License Reinstatement Program (LRP), Newark Now, the City of Newark, New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission, Essex County College’s Opportunity Reconnect, Reentry Legal Services (ReLeSe) of Volunteer Lawyers for Justice, New Jersey Department of Labor, and Newark’s One-Stop Career Center.

**WHEN:** Tuesday, February 24, 2:00-5:00pm.

**WHERE:** Essex County College, 303 University Avenue, Newark, NJ, 07102, Green and Yellow Area.

**WHY:** *With over 400 different grounds for license suspensions, thousands of residents throughout New Jersey are persistently affected and unable to drive.*

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Having a valid driver’s license can be the key to getting and keeping a job, especially for people just entering or returning to the workforce. Many entry-level jobs with career

possibilities in growing fields – including the building and construction trades, automobile mechanics, and commercial driving – require a driver’s license. Other jobs in this suburban state are simply unreachable by public transportation. The demands of child care and other family responsibilities increase the need for transportation independence among new and returning workers.

**There are over 400 grounds for suspension in New Jersey – many of which have nothing to do with unsafe driving.** In fact, over half of all suspensions are imposed for financial reasons including failure to pay fines, surcharges and other penalties. An individual’s license can be suspended for multiple reasons, or on multiple charges, at the same time. Some suspensions are imposed by the courts, and some by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission. The procedures to address each of these kinds of suspension vary greatly, and navigating more than one at a time can be confusing and logistically challenging. Restoring a license that has been suspended can be costly as well.

An individual who can drive and work can begin to pay back their debt. These programs are about providing an affordable way for safe but suspended drivers to get their licenses back and break the cycle of increasing fines and penalties. It is a solid source of revenue for the courts and State and a pragmatic solution to an intractable problem of uncollected fines.

***It also increases revenue to the courts and the state by facilitating repayment and reduces the likelihood that people will drive with suspended licenses.***

Public and private agencies and advocates around the state who are providing job training and job search assistance have also found their work frustrated by the prevalence of license suspension among the individuals they are trying to help.

**The purpose of this License Restoration Fair was to help individuals with suspended licenses connect with information and advocates to help them understand and navigate the complex web of laws and regulations affecting driver’s license suspension in New Jersey. It is our hope that this training helped more than three hundred New Jersey residents who participated in today’s fair reach employment and greater economic stability.**

Among the fair’s co-sponsoring organizations was Newark Reentry Legal Services (ReLeSe), a program of Volunteer Lawyers for Justice that was developed in collaboration with the Institute, Newark Mayor Cory Booker’s Office, local law firms and nonprofit partners. Ulysses Coleman, a former client of ReLeSe, shared with today’s participants his story of license suspension and reinstatement: “[After being incarcerated], I had a \$4100 surcharge that Motor Vehicles sent to a collection agency. My license was suspended for almost ten years when I met an attorney from ReLeSe. She went to court with me, contacted the collection agency. Now I’m on a payment plan, have my license back. Thanks to ReLeSe, I’m driving, can get to school, and life is easier because I have my driver’s license.”

Hon. Anthony J. Frasca, Presiding Judge of the Municipal Division, attended the fair on behalf of the Essex Vicinage, explaining to participants how to apply for the License Reinstatement Program (LRP), a program developed in partnership with the Institute.

"Especially during these tough economic times, it is important that we provide an affordable way for safe but suspended drivers to get their licenses back," Mayor Booker said, "By restoring their ability to drive to work or get to school we are breaking the cycle of increasing fines and penalties which in turn will help them to continue to lead productive lives."

"Driver's license restoration is a cost-effective way to build pathways to work for our fellow New Jerseyans," says Cornell William Brooks, Executive Director of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. "We are pleased to be working with Newark Now, the City of Newark, the Essex Courts, and our other partners on this important effort to help build the access and awareness required to achieve license restoration at greater scale and scope."

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This month and next, the Institute will conclude a training series on its license restoration manual, "Getting Back on the Road: A Manual for Addressing Driver's License Suspension in New Jersey." These trainings are intended for job developers and social service providers who seek a greater understanding of the license restoration process, in order to assist their clients with license reinstatement. Remaining trainings will take place in Essex, Union, Camden, Mercer, and/or Passaic Counties.

Anyone interested in attending one of the remaining trainings can contact Laurel Dumont or Mara Codey at [info@njisj.org](mailto:info@njisj.org) / (973) 624-9400. Please provide your name, affiliation, and contact information when emailing or leaving a voice message.

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