

Chairman Nangle, Senator Pierce, Senator Farrin, and Transportation Committee Members,

I hope you are doing well. I am writing to advocate for a critical change in the way vehicle taxes are administered in Maine, particularly for unhoused individuals as pertains to LD 611: An Act to Allow the Secretary of State to Collect Excise Taxes on Motor Vehicles Owned by Residents Who Are Unhoused. As you may know, many unhoused individuals rely on their vehicles as a means of transportation, whether it's for work, accessing essential services, or staying mobile in the absence of stable housing. However, current policies often prevent them from paying vehicle taxes without a permanent address, which creates unnecessary barriers to their autonomy and stability. Many unhoused individuals want to be law abiding citizens and current policies prevent them from doing so.

Allowing unhoused individuals to pay vehicle taxes without the requirement of a permanent address would not only acknowledge their basic right to mobility, but it would also promote fairness and equality in our community. Here are some reasons why this change is essential:

1. **Ensuring Access to Mobility:** For many unhoused individuals, a vehicle is their lifeline, providing access to employment opportunities, healthcare, and resources necessary for survival. Preventing them from paying taxes and keeping their vehicles registered due to the lack of a permanent address further isolates them and reduces their ability to function legally within society.
2. **Protecting Legal and Civic Rights:** Everyone, regardless of their housing status, should be able to comply with local regulations and avoid unnecessary legal penalties. Being unable to pay vehicle taxes due to an address requirement can lead to fines, impounding of their vehicle, and even criminal charges, further exacerbating the difficulties they already face.
3. **Addressing the Root Causes of Homelessness:** Unhoused individuals are often already dealing with systemic challenges such as lack of affordable housing, inadequate access to social services, and barriers to employment. By removing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers, we help level the playing field and support individuals on their journey towards stability. Without their vehicle, they have even more limitation to access employment, healthcare, and the road to stable housing.
4. **Promoting Dignity and Inclusion:** This policy change would affirm that unhoused individuals are valued members of our society, deserving of the same rights and opportunities as anyone else. It is a matter of dignity to ensure that they can access the necessary tools to live independently and avoid criminalization. Being homeless should not be illegal or prevent someone from following basic civil laws.

I strongly encourage you to support legislation or policies that would allow unhoused individuals to pay their vehicle taxes without requiring a permanent address. This small yet significant change could make a world of difference in the lives of many people, helping them to stay mobile, remain compliant with the law, and maintain some degree of independence as they navigate the challenges of homelessness.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I appreciate your leadership and hope that we can work together to ensure a more equitable and compassionate future for all members of our community.

Sincerely,

Reverend Brooklin Jones-Banahan, LCSW