Freedom to Move: Durham Driver’s License Access and the DEAR Program

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Introduction
- 46,000 Durham County residents have a suspended or revoked license
- Reasons for license suspension: minor traffic violations followed by a failure to appear to pay the fines and fees associated with tickets or failure to appear in court
- Median suspension length: 11.7 years

Research Question
How does driver’s license suspension and reinstatement affect life outcomes for Durham residents, and how do unlicensed drivers experience the license restoration process?

Themes that emerged from the interviews
- Parenting difficulties without a car
- Restricted social connections
- Limited job opportunities
- Driver license
- Restoration is a time intensive process
- Having a license is a privilege
- Reduced autonomy

License Restoration’s Meaning for Individuals
“The world. The world. I’d tell a judge I get to go to the grocery store. I can go to church without going under a church van. I get to take my grandkids to school, pick them up, go on trips with them.”

“Oh, wow... the number of doors that would open up... it could... help increase the amount of income that I'm making a lot of driving positions and things that I-I-I can put myself into, um, other shifts that I could work and not have to worry about coming home late nights.”

Data Collection Demographics
- Method: Qualitative interviews conducted with individuals eligible for the DEAR program, our community partner

Community Partner: DEAR
- DEAR aims to restore suspended licenses by waiving unpaid traffic tickets and fines
- Participant Reactions to the DEAR program:
  - Gratefulness
  - Some lost faith in the program after not hearing back after 2-3 months
  - Still experienced red tape going through other systems with limited communication with DEAR (i.e., the courts and the DMV)
- Because of their positive view of the program, participants would like to see the program expand its reach.

Looking Ahead: Policy Implications
- Contacting and checking up frequently with those eligible for DEAR and expanding the size of the DEAR communications team.
- Improve communication between the DMV and the DEAR program.
- Streamline and simplify the license restoration process, while adjusting fines for low-income individuals.