

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 7, 2011

Contact: Nichole Yunk Todd

Phone: 414-343-3581

Electronic mail: nyunk@wiscs.org

Wisconsin State Legislature Passes Bipartisan Measure That Will Allow More Wisconsin Drivers to Get to Work

The Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability Praises State Lawmakers

Madison, Wisconsin— The Wisconsin State Legislature has passed a bipartisan measure that will decrease the number of years of a driver's license suspension for a damage judgment arising from an uninsured auto accident from 20 to five. The 20-year penalty is the most excessive in the country, with most other states requiring a five or seven year suspension for the same violation. By comparison, the *maximum revocation period for drunk drivers* in Wisconsin is *three years* and the *maximum revocation period for killing someone in a hit and run accident* is *five years*. Judgment holders against uninsured drivers will still be able to collect for monetary damages for the full 20 years.

Over the past ten years, there have been 29,689 such suspensions statewide, according to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. The bill allows the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to apply the law change to persons with existing suspensions over the next five years, which means that tens of thousands of Wisconsin drivers will be able to drive again legally if they have served a five-year suspension or longer and maintain safety responsibility ("SR-22") insurance for three years. Governor Walker is expected to sign the measure soon.

The authors and champions of the bipartisan bill include Senator Frank Lasee (R-De Pere), Representative Jerry Petrowski (R- Marathon), Senator Spencer Coggs (D-Milwaukee), and Representative Jason Fields (D-Milwaukee). Co-sponsors include Senators Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee), Jim Holperin (D- Conover), Luther Olsen (R-Ripon); and Representatives Tamara Grigsby (D-Milwaukee), Mark Honadel (R-Oak Creek), Kathy Bernier (R- Chippewa Falls), Janet Bewley (D- Ashland), Ed Brooks (R- Reedsburg), Mike Endsley (R- Sheboygan), Al Ott (R-Forest Junction), Richard Spanbauer (R-Oshkosh), Chris Taylor (D- Madison), Robert Turner (D- Racine), and Amy Sue Vruwink (D-Milladore).

The Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability advocated for this change as part of its goal to limit license suspension and revocation to unsafe driving. It is the fourth state policy reform that the group has achieved since it was established in March of 2007 to increase

the number of licensed low-income drivers in Milwaukee County. The group has demonstrated that non-driving related driver's license suspensions and revocations, like this suspension, disproportionately affect people who have low incomes in all areas of Wisconsin and that a valid driver's license increases wages.

The Honorable James A. Gramling, Jr., a retired municipal court judge in Milwaukee and pro bono attorney for the Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability, sees the change as positive step for the state's economy: "Drivers in this situation are most often low-income and want to work, but have few options. Rather than being suspended from driving for 20 years for an amount usually under \$5,000 or filing for bankruptcy, this change will allow them to get their licenses, get back to get to work, and pay off the judgment. Hopefully they can then obtain auto insurance to avoid another similar circumstance."

The Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability is part of *Wisconsin Community Services, Inc. (WCS)*, a non-profit organization that advocates for justice and community safety by creating opportunities for individuals to overcome adversity. Other major partners include *Legal Action of Wisconsin, City of Milwaukee Municipal Court, and Milwaukee Area Technical College.*