Thursday May 18, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety and Honorable Members of Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

There is a provision within AB 201 / SB 189 that requires drivers who commit a low-level traffic violation that results in no injuries to attend a vehicle right-of-way course. This appears to include violations such as rolling through stop signs, improperly switching lanes, improperly entering the highway, and other minor traffic violations. YWCA Madison opposes this provision in the proposed legislation, and we ask you to remove it from the bill.

Right-of-way courses are costly. Classes offered through Wisconsin’s Department of Transportation range from $65 to $125. Those fees are substantial for low-income individuals who struggle to meet basic needs. This cost is more than the weekly grocery bill or a monthly heating or electricity bill. In addition, the online classes require access to a computer and high-speed internet. While many of us take such access for granted, internet service is expensive and limited in low-income neighborhoods. Many do not have internet access, let alone access to a computer.

The proposed bill continues that individuals who do not complete the right-of-way course will have their licenses suspended for up to 5 years. By taking away their transportation, people already in poverty will have less access to jobs, training, education, and other services they need. This bill will overwhelmingly punish those who can least afford it.

YWCA Madison knows this first-hand. We run Dane County’s only Driver’s License Recovery Program, assisting those who have had their licenses suspended for civil violations.   Our clients come to us because they need a license to meet an essential need, such as getting to and from work or school, transporting a child to daycare or school, or obtaining employment for a job they otherwise qualify for but for the lack of a driver’s license. In 2015, we served 247 individuals. All of our clients live in poverty. Some are homeless, and most are housing-unstable. The majority of our clients have families to support and are struggling to meet the basic needs of shelter, clothing, and food for themselves and their families. The majority of our clients are people of color.

We appreciate the intent of this bill to keep our roads safe, and we understand that driving is a privilege. But mandating costly training for violators of minor infractions that do not result in any injury will result in low-income individuals either paying fees they cannot afford or losing their licenses because of their poverty. The disproportionate impact of this provision will take away driver’s privileges from those in our community who need it the most.

YWCA Madison asks you to remove this requirement from AB 201 / SB 189. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Carousel Bayrd, our Policy and Partnership Coordinator, at   
(608) 395-2196.

Sincerely,

Vanessa McDowell  
Interim CEO