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***Statement from Safe & Just Michigan Executive Director John S. Cooper  
on the passage of bills related to the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail  
and Pretrial Incarceration:***

“We are very pleased to see the Michigan Senate pass bills based on the recommendations of the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration this week. These bills will take important steps toward ending Michigan’s overuse of jails and end harmful practices such as suspending driver’s licenses for non-driving conduct — usually failure to pay fines and fees — that negatively impact hundreds of thousands of Michiganders annually. The Task Force found that each year, 5 percent of all licensed drivers, or about 350,000 people, have their licenses suspended for failure to pay fines and fees. Driving with a suspended license is the third-leading cause of admission to jail in Michigan.

“The ability to drive is essential to daily life for many people in Michigan, yet we suspend licenses as a debt collection tactic. In doing so, we prioritize court debt over people’s ability to work and care for their families. This criminalization of poverty is tragically counterproductive and drives vulnerable people and their families into destructive cycles of poverty and incarceration. Even worse, it does so without any meaningful public safety justification. After all, these suspensions are *by definition* unrelated to the safety of a person’s driving.

“Ending these harmful, unnecessary practices will help thousands of people get to work and keep their jobs instead of cycling through Michigan’s jail system, thereby improving both economic productivity *and* public safety in our state.

“Safe & Just Michigan thanks the bill sponsors, legislative leadership, and the Joint Task Force on Jails and Pretrial Incarceration for making these reforms a priority during this legislative session.

“In the dwindling days of this legislative session, we urge lawmakers to prioritize passing the remaining bills based on the Jails Task Force recommendations. These bills have progressed with overwhelming margins of support and would cap a banner year for criminal justice reform in Michigan.”

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