



# My driver's license was suspended for unpaid criminal traffic fines. Can I get it back?

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- ❖ Read this *only* if your license was issued by Washington State.
  - ❖ You can find all the packets and fact sheets we link to here at [WashingtonLawHelp.org](http://WashingtonLawHelp.org).
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## Should I read this?

The Department of License (DOL) suspends drivers' licenses for a variety of reasons. Each reason has different steps to reinstatement.

This publication explains how to reinstate your license if it was suspended because you have **unpaid criminal traffic fines**, also called "legal financial obligations," or "LFOs".

## I am not sure if my license is suspended and the reason. How can I find out?

To confirm that your license is *suspended*, check the [status of your license online](#) by searching at: [fortress.wa.gov/dol/extdriveses/NoLogon](http://fortress.wa.gov/dol/extdriveses/NoLogon) or call 360-902-3900. You will need your Washington driver's license number and your date of birth. No account or login information is needed. You do not need to pay for a copy of your complete driving record.

To confirm that DOL suspended your license *because of unpaid criminal traffic fines*, register online for a [License eXpress](#) account with the DOL. Go to [dol.wa.gov/licenseexpress.html](http://dol.wa.gov/licenseexpress.html).

**Do not try to get this information from a collection agency.** Different courts use different agencies. A collection agency only has information about tickets assigned to it.

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- ❖ **Out-of-State Suspensions:** If your license from another state is suspended, Washington also suspends your license. This is true even if Washington DOL has issued you a license that looks valid. You must contact that state's driver's license agency to find out how to fix your suspension.
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## How do I reinstate my license suspended for criminal traffic fines?

Call the clerk's office for the court that fined you. Ask them what you need to do to reinstate your license. Ask them if they have a Relicensing Program, which can help lower your fine and/or set up a payment plan. Not all courts have this program.

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- ❖ If you cannot get through to a clerk, you could go to the courthouse. But **if there is a bench warrant against you, they may arrest you at the courthouse.**
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If the court has a Relicensing Program, ask:

- if you can take part in it
- how you can take part
- what to bring to court

## How do I get ready for a Relicensing Program?

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- ❖ Your goal is to persuade the court to recall the fine from collections and waive all collection fees and interest and let you set up a payment plan on the fine only or work it off through community service.
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**Bring proof of your financial situation.** If you cannot pay the fine in full, bring proof that you get public assistance (**Examples:** food assistance, ABD, TANF, SSI/SSDI), rent or mortgage bills, utility bills, pay stubs, tax forms, debts, and so on.

**Have an explanation ready for your underlying ticket and/or driving record.** The judge may ask you to explain your ticket and/or driving record.

This is especially true if:

- you have gotten many traffic tickets recently

- you have gotten more than one ticket for the same thing
- you were driving without a license or insurance

**Bring proof of valid license, insurance, or tabs.** If the underlying ticket was for driving without a license, insurance, or current tabs, you should bring proof that you now have or at the time you got the ticket had a license, insurance, or tabs.

### **There is no relicensing program. Now what?**

If there is no relicensing program, you can ask for a hearing to address a traffic ticket that is suspending your license. **Not all courts will grant this hearing.** If you have already had a hearing on the ticket, you might not get another one.

Some courts may have you ask in writing. If so, ask the court clerk if they can give you copies of the forms you need.

If they do not have any forms, you can ask the court to reduce your fines and fees to the extent the law allows using [How to ask a court to cancel your non-restitution interest and/or reduce your LFOs](#).

### **I have old or new non-criminal traffic tickets I have not paid. Will they suspend my license?**

DOL cannot suspend your license based on these types of traffic tickets:

- **Traffic tickets** for a **moving** traffic violation, such as speeding or for a **non-moving** violation, such as parking tickets or faulty equipment violations **cannot** suspend your license.
- **Traffic tickets issued before July 1, 2005 cannot** suspend your license. It does not matter if they are still unpaid.

**However**, if you do not pay them, they can still be sent to collection agencies and lower your credit rating. Do **not** ignore these.

If tickets in these categories are suspending your license, ask the DOL to lift the suspensions.

### **Should I try to work something out with the collection agency?**

If the court will not pull it from the collection agency, that is all you can do.

Here are some tips:

- **Offer a Payoff.** Collection agencies will often take less than the full amount owed if you offer to pay a lower amount in full immediately. “Full amount” means the original fine amount, collection fees, and interest. Half the full amount is usually a good first offer. If the first person you talk to does not offer a payoff amount you can afford, ask for a supervisor. They will often offer something better.
- **Offer a Monthly Payment Plan.** If you set up a payment plan, you will probably end up paying more than you would through a “payoff.” With a payment plan, you must pay off the full fine amount. This includes fees and interest. On the upside, the agency will release your license as soon as you make the first payment. When setting up a payment plan, you may have to make a down payment of about 10% of the total owed and show proof you can make future payments. **Do not agree to pay more than you can afford.** If you miss a payment, your license will be re-suspended. The collection agency might not want to work out a new agreement.
- **Avoid Garnishment.** Collection agencies can “garnish” your wages and bank accounts to pay your unpaid fines. (See below for an explanation.) Keep this from happening by making payments.
- Do **not** give a collection agency info about your job, bank accounts, or other sources of income.
- Do **not** pay by check or with a debit card.
- Make payments by credit card or money order.

### **I need some kind of ID right away.**

If you get public assistance, have your DSHS caseworker fill out the Request for Identicard form below. Take that form to the DOL.

A Washington State Identification card costs \$5.

### **My tickets are in garnishment or “judgment.”**

Once a court has issued a writ of garnishment, a collection agency can directly take money from your wages, bank accounts, or certain other sources of income.

If you earn less than these amounts, none of your wages can be garnished:

- \$253.75 weekly
- \$507.50 every 2 weeks
- \$549.80 twice a month
- \$1,099.58 monthly

Even if you earn more than these amounts, you may still keep 35x the federal minimum wage or 75% of your net pay, whichever is more.

At a minimum, \$500 in your bank account cannot be garnished (\$500 is considered “exempt”) and \$1,000 additional cash is exempt, for a total of \$1,500).

If your bank account is garnished leaving you with less than \$1,500, you may file an exemption claim within 21 days of the date of the first garnishment. See [How to Claim Personal Property Exemptions](#).

**If your wages or bank account are garnished, the court usually cannot pull that ticket from collections.** You can try to work out a payment plan with the collection agency. If you have a low income, apply for legal help (see below.)

### **Can I get a restricted license while I am trying to reinstate my driver’s license?**

**Maybe.** While your driver’s license is suspended or revoked, you may be eligible to receive an [Occupational/Restricted Driver License](#) (ORL).

For information about restricted licenses, contact the Department of Licensing: [dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/orl.html](http://dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/orl.html).

## Get Legal Help

- **Apply online** with [CLEAR\\*Online](https://nwjustice.org/apply-online) - [nwjustice.org/apply-online](https://nwjustice.org/apply-online)
- **Facing a legal issue in King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call 2-1-1 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) weekdays 8:00 am - 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.
- **Facing a legal issue outside of King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am - 12:15 pm or apply online at [nwjustice.org/apply-online](https://nwjustice.org/apply-online).
- **Facing Eviction?** Call 1-855-657-8387.
- **Facing Foreclosure?** Call 1-800-606-4819.
- **Seniors (age 60 and over)** with a legal issue outside of King County can also call CLEAR\*Sr at 1-888-387-7111.
- **Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers** can call any of these numbers using the relay service of your choice.

CLEAR and 2-1-1 will provide interpreters.

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