FORMER SEATTLE POLICE CHIEF CARMEN BEST URGES WASHINGTON SENATE TO PASS CRITICAL DRIVER'S LICENSE SUSPENSION REFORM

Balanced Reform Addresses Criminalization of Poverty, Strengthens Accountability & Public Safety; S.B. 5226 Enjoys Support from Law Enforcement Across the State

(Olympia, WA) -- In a letter sent to Senators, former Chief of the Seattle Police Department and Law Enforcement Leaders member Carmen Best called on the Washington State Senate to address counterproductive driver's license suspension practices that punish Washingtonians for inability to pay traffic fines, rather than promoting public safety. Sponsored by Senator Jesse Salomon (D-32), Senate Bill 5226 is a key reform that would eliminate 'failure to pay' and 'failure to appear' as causes for driver's license suspension in non-criminal traffic infractions. It also strengthens accountability by reducing the number of traffic infractions in a year that lead to license suspension and requiring a safe driver's course before reinstatement. The bill passed in the Senate Committee on Law & Justice in February and is awaiting a vote on the Senate floor. There are several amendments that change the intent of the bill and Chief Best and other advocates urge the Senate to pass the underlying bill without the hostile amendments.

Excerpt from Retired Chief of Seattle Police Carmen Best's Letter to Washington State Legislature:

As a law enforcement officer for over thirty years, much of my life has been spent keeping our communities safe and enforcing the laws and policies meant to do so. ***That's why I'm writing strongly in support of the underlying Senate Bill 5226*** *-- a key criminal justice measure that would reform Washington's driver's license suspension laws and move our justice system away from the so-called "tough on crime" practices that criminalize poverty, rather than protect our residents.*

Sponsored by Senator Jesse Salomon, this bipartisan legislation ends the suspension of driver's licenses for reasons unrelated to public safety, while strengthening accountability for those who continue to commit infractions. The bill eliminates "failure to pay" and "failure to appear" as causes for driver's license suspension in non-criminal traffic infractions, modifies traffic tickets to allow an individual to admit responsibility and attest they can't afford the fine, and empowers the courts to set up payment plans or waive traffic infraction fines and fees

(unless expressly prohibited from waiver by state law). Critically, this bill will hold drivers who break the law accountable, particularly those who commit multiple or criminal infractions.

If passed, [Senate Bill 5226](#) would go into effect January 1, 2022 and:

- Eliminate failure to pay (FTP) and failure to appear (FTA) as causes for driver's license suspension in non-criminal traffic infractions.

- Strengthen accountability measures by modifying the number of traffic infractions that lead to suspensions: currently 6 moving infractions in 12 months or 7 in 24 months lead to a driver's license suspension. This bill would require suspension after 3 in 12 months or 4 in 24 months. The suspension shall last for 60 days and require the driver to complete a safe driver's course. There will be no reinstatement fee for the license in this case.

- Authorize the Department of Licensing to administratively reinstate licenses for those who had a license suspended for FTP/FTA.

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About Justice Action Network
Justice Action Network is the largest bipartisan 501(c)(4) organization in the country advocating for criminal justice reform at the state and federal level. From state houses to the White House, Justice Action Network and its partners from the right to the left have paved the way for life-changing criminal justice reforms that safely reduce incarceration, provide second chance opportunities, save taxpayer dollars, and make our communities safer. For more information on their work, visit www.justiceactionnetwork.org

About Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration
Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration (LEL) unites over 200 current and former police chiefs, sheriffs, federal and state prosecutors, attorneys general, and correctional officials from all 50 states and across the political spectrum to urge for smart practice and policies to reduce crime and incarceration. Chief Best (Ret.) is a member of the LEL coalition. To learn more, visit http://lawenforcementleaders.org/