

# TRAFFIC DEBT AND LICENSE SUSPENSIONS IN NORTH CAROLINA: *BY THE NUMBERS*

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of North Carolina, and Southern Coalition for Social Justice [challenged the North Carolina DMV's practice](#) of automatically suspending the licenses of individuals who could not afford to pay traffic fines and court costs.

In 2022, a federal court approved a settlement that requires the DMV to provide drivers with written notice about their right to request a court hearing to prevent or stop a license suspension if they are unable to

pay outstanding traffic fines and court costs. DMV had not previously informed drivers of the option to have these costs waived or reduced when attempting to collect them.

The settlement also required the DMV to compile and share certain data concerning its suspension processes, including the number of new notices sent to drivers, the number of drivers who were able to prevent or end their suspension, and the number of overall new suspensions. An analysis of that data is below.

## STATEWIDE DATA HIGHLIGHTS (2022-2025)

**495,799**

Number of drivers who have been given **proper notice of their rights** to prevent or end a license suspension under NC law.

Over this time period, more suspensions have been prevented or ended statewide than new suspensions have begun. This is a promising trend given how the license suspension regime has historically penalized poverty.

However, the number of new suspensions each month has remained consistently between 3,500 and 6,500 drivers.

**NOTABLY**, suspensions continue to be the most common outcome when a driver misses a court deadline to pay traffic costs or court fines and enters the DMV suspension process.

**126,893**

Number of drivers with outstanding license suspensions who got their licenses **reinstated** by either paying their fines or obtaining court relief.



**100,899**

Number of drivers who have **prevented** their license from being suspended by either paying their fines or obtaining court relief.

**199,992**

Number of drivers who have had their license suspended.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the litigation or help with a driver's license suspension, please visit: <https://resolvetrafficdebtnc.org>.

## COUNTY-SPECIFIC HIGHLIGHTS (2022-2025)

### SUSPENSION PREVENTION RATES

These are the five counties with the **highest** and **lowest** rates of suspension prevention.\*

Higher rates mean a driver was more likely to avoid a suspension once noticed of their outstanding fines and fees.

\*Excludes counties with less than 1,000 revised notices sent out during the reporting period.

1  
RUTHERFORD  
(56.65%)

2  
ONSLOW  
(56.19%)

3  
MARTIN  
(5.32%)

4  
JOHNSTON  
(53.58%)

5  
MCDOWELL  
(50.64%)

THE STATEWIDE AVERAGE FOR ALL 100 COUNTIES WAS **37.86%**

1  
CALDWELL  
(24.32%)

2  
MECKLENBURG  
(26.41%)

3  
GASTON  
(26.77%)

4  
DUPLIN  
(29.19%)

5  
BURKE  
(29.33%)

### RATES OF SUSPENSION RELATIVE TO TOTAL POPULATION

These are the five counties with the **highest** and **lowest** rates of suspension relative to their total population.\*

Higher rates suggest that these counties may be over policing and/or have particularly inflexible or punitive court systems.

\*Excludes counties with total populations of less than 50,000.

1  
COLUMBUS  
(4.8%)

2  
RANDOLPH  
(3.7%)

3  
BURKE  
(3.4%)

4  
ROWAN  
(3.3%)

5  
LENOIR  
(3.1%)

THE STATEWIDE AVERAGE FOR ALL 100 COUNTIES WAS **1.85%**

1  
BUNCOMBE  
(0.27%)

2  
NASH  
(0.48%)

3  
MECKLENBURG  
(0.62%)

4  
WILSON  
(0.67%)

5  
ONSLOW  
(0.73%)

## CONCLUSIONS

Though this litigation has created more opportunities for drivers to avail themselves of a fee waiver or payment plan, the DMV suspension scheme continues to result in a substantial number of drivers losing their license.

There is wide variability from county to county in terms of the rates of suspension and rates of prevention. This suggests that practices within specific jurisdictions may be driving different outcomes.

More must be done to help divert drivers across the state from costly and indefinite periods of license suspension.

For access to the raw data underlying this summary, contact [votingrightsteam@scsj.org](mailto:votingrightsteam@scsj.org).