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## **License suspension has consequences**

By Chris Gosier, Daily Record

New Jersey law provides a multitude of ways to get a driver's license suspended -- about 300, by one estimate. The number of suspension offenses topped 700,000 last year.

Now, researchers are setting out to learn the consequences of all those suspended licenses.

The effort by Rutgers University and the state Motor Vehicle Commission is required under a 2003 law to reform security and improve customer service.

One concern is the effect on the drivers' jobs -- "having access to a car is very important to finding and keeping a job" in New Jersey, said Jon Carnegie, assistant director of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers.

Suspended drivers could become a burden on friends and family by hitching rides, or may end up switching jobs or becoming unemployed, making it harder to pay the fines needed to reinstate their licenses, he said.

"There are cases where some individuals with suspensions can owe in the tens of thousands of dollars to get their licenses back" because of the accumulation of unpaid fines over time, Carnegie said.

Rutgers experts have been studying policies in other states. Questionnaires are being mailed to 7,500 New Jersey drivers in hopes of learning whether lower-income drivers are disproportionately hurt by suspensions, and how long the suspensions tend to last, among other data.

The study will continue for at least another six months, with the results eventually forwarded to the MVC's Fairness and Affordability Task Force, which will make recommendations to the governor and the Legislature, said Don Borowski, director of driver management and regulatory affairs for the MVC.

The courts or the Motor Vehicle Commission can suspend licenses for any number of reasons: driving under the influence, accumulating points, failing to appear in court, failing to pay fines, even failing to pay child support, to name some.

Of 714,000 suspensions last year, about 274,000 resulted from parking infractions or other offenses, such as failing to appear for various municipal court summonses, state data show. Others result from alcohol and drug offenses, or nonpayment of surcharges on other motor vehicle offenses.

Carnegie spoke of a "menu of solutions" that could be used if a problem exists. They include provisional or conditional licenses allowing suspended drivers to drive within

limited hours to limited locations -- for instance, to school, work or drug treatment programs. New Jersey is one of only six states without such a program, he said.

He also suggested an amnesty program, such as one held by the MVC last year, in which drivers' accumulated fines were waived if they paid the original fines for their offenses.

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