

Fighting traffic tickets just got easier

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Californians will be allowed to challenge most routine traffic tickets without having to first pay the contested fines under a bill signed into law Wednesday by Gov. Jerry Brown.



The measure, which takes effect immediately, was one of 37 bills signed by the governor Wednesday. Others help homeless youths get high school degrees and allow early release for some terminally ill jail inmates.

The bill on traffic tickets is in response to widespread complaints that the current system lacks due process and that many motorists cannot afford to pay escalating court costs and can lose the use of their car if their license is suspended, making it harder to go to work or school.

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“The system was broken,” said Sen. Robert Hertzberg (D-Van Nuys), who introduced the bill. “Is it reasonable or fair to require the poor to pay a huge fine before getting a hearing? I say no, and I’m grateful the governor agreed.”

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More than 4 million Californians had their driver's licenses suspended from 2006 to 2013 because they didn't pay their fines on time or missed their court date, the senator said. That resulted in \$10 billion in fines.

The Times recently reported how a traffic ticket with a base fine of \$100 will also see court fees and other costs added on to raise its cost to \$500, and that increases to \$815 if the motorist misses the deadline for payment.

If the deadline is missed, many counties will allow a court hearing only if fines are paid first, something that many drivers can no longer afford. That policy is overturned by the bill signed by the governor.

“By allowing people to have their day in court without having to pay the ticket first, fewer people will get their license suspended and end up in dire straits,” said Mike Herald of the Western Center for Law and Poverty, which asked for SB 405.

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