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An Overview of Driver's License Suspension for Arrested Sex Buyers in the United States

Summary Based Upon Research from the
National Assessments of Prostitution and Sex
Trafficking Demand Reduction Efforts



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Of the tactics identified to combat demand, driver's license suspension is the least frequently used. The first known use of suspending the licenses of sex buyers occurred in [Beardstown](#), IL in 1960 (Table 1). Few cities have followed this example. As of March, 2023, we knew of just 35 communities that have suspended the driver's licenses of arrested sex buyers. That represents an increase of just 10 additional cities and counties identified since Demand Forum was first launched in January, 2013, even though the total number of U.S. jurisdictions represented in Demand Forum has increased from 900 to more than 2,650. A complete list of cities and counties known to have implemented this tactic is provided in Table 2.

The concept and execution of license suspensions are simple. There must be a local ordinance or a state statute in place to support driver's license suspensions for misdemeanor offenses (or ordinance violations) including soliciting prostitution, and if so, judges or magistrates can choose to impose that punishment on arrested sex buyers. A state law in California (California Vehicle Code 13201.5) specifically allowed for driver's license suspensions for those who solicit prostitution, but that law was repealed Jan. 1, 2020 (through SB 485). Other states allow for license suspensions for those using motor vehicles for those engaged in several different prostitution-related offenses, including sex buying. For example, New Jersey law ([NJ Rev Stat § 2C:34-1 \(2013\)](#)) includes:

"...where a motor vehicle was used in the commission of any offense under paragraph (1) of subsection b. the court shall suspend for six months the driving privilege of any such offender who has a valid driver's license issued by this State. Upon conviction, the court shall immediately collect the offender's driver's license and shall forward it, along with a report stating the first and last day of the suspension imposed pursuant to this paragraph, to the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission."

It is unknown how often this provision has been applied to sex buyers in New Jersey, or to prostituted persons or facilitators (i.e., pimps). For more information on key elements of state prostitution laws that apply to sex buyers, including the sanctions imposed for arrested buyers, please see our [summary](#) posted on [Demand Forum](#).

Among the small number of cases we could identify, driver's license suspensions are not imposed for long – usually less than one year. For example, in [Casselberry](#), FL, a sex buyer may have their license suspended for up to one year, but it is reportedly rare for the maximum suspension to be imposed. The New Jersey state law specifies suspension for a period of six months.

The objections raised in response to license suspensions for sex buyers are similar to those of identity disclosure and vehicle seizure. Given that many male sex buyers are married, in relationships, and employed, anything that jeopardizes the offender's income or transportation can negatively impact their partners and families. For example, a father's license suspension can pose hardships for any children who rely on him for transportation, especially if that father is the only family member with a driver's license. The response to such concerns in jurisdictions that have chosen to suspend the driver's licenses (or seize the vehicles) of sex buyers is that it is the offender's criminal acts that jeopardize others, rather than the actions of the criminal justice system that is simply enforcing the law. Using the impact on offender families as a justification for withholding criminal justice sanctions would result in the withholding of the vast majority of punishments, for the majority of offenders. About this issue, one interview subject for the second National Assessment (2022) said,

"Plenty of men are the transportation and income source for their families, and every one we send to prison, or take their car, or give big fines creates problems for their families. But we don't think twice about that for violent gang members or murderers... or for pimps or human traffickers, for that matter. Why should we treat the johns any differently? Especially since johns are the only reason the victims are out there in the first place. It's a crime, and there have to be consequences. If it impacts their families, its on the criminal, not the system."

Retired Sheriff's Deputy, Florida (2022)

Evidence of Effectiveness

While there have been numerous studies of the impact of driver's license suspensions, they have all focused on vehicle related outcomes, such as subsequent accidents, traffic violations, or drunk driving incidents.¹ There have been no formal evaluations of the effectiveness of suspending driver's licenses of arrested sex buyers as a tactic to deter demand for prostitution, but that kind of evidence is very rarely available in assessing the value of criminal justice interventions of any kind. Compared to other ways of combating prostitution and sex trafficking (e.g., victim rescues, trafficker arrest and prosecution, legalization or decriminalization of prostitution), a strong case can be made for license suspensions being an effective tactic, with three distinct kinds of evidence all reflecting favourably on the approach:

1. Surveys of hundreds of admitted sex buyers have asked what would deter them from that behavior in the future, and were presented with a list of options. The things most commonly listed as likely to deter them are consequences following arrest, such as jail time, being listed on a sex offender registry, and the public disclosure of their arrest. Such responses were made by more than **80% of surveyed sex buyers**.² Although not specified in the surveys, it is reasonable to assume that post-arrest sanctions such as vehicle seizure and driver's licenses suspension are within the same general category of negative consequences that sex buyers say would serve as a deterrent.
2. The survey data is aligned with extensive anecdotal evidence³ from the field of law enforcement vice operations and investigations, which consistently finds that once arrested, sex buyers express great **concern about the consequences of that arrest** – especially that their behavior will be exposed to their families, partners, friends, employers, and others in their communities. Driver's license suspension can be disruptive and require adjustments that can, in turn, require explanation to friends, families, and employers – which is something sex buyers clearly seek to avoid.
3. The survey findings and anecdotal evidence provided by law enforcement is further corroborated by a vast body of criminological research on deterrence that finds that both **“legal sanctions”** (such as incarceration or probation, which require a prior arrest and prosecution) and **“extra-legal sanctions”** (such as negative consequences for relationships and employment, which also are usually triggered by arrest) **have a deterrent effect on re-offending**.⁴

¹ David J. DeYoung, “An evaluation of the general deterrent effect of vehicle impoundment on suspended and revoked drivers in California,” *Journal of Safety Research* 31, no. 2 (2000): 51-59, doi:10.1016/S0022-4375(00)00024-4; Jaeyeon Lee, Byung-Jung Park, and Chungwon Lee, “Deterrent effects of demerit points and license sanctions on drivers' traffic law violations using a proportional hazard model,” *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 113, (2018): 279-286, doi:10.1016/j.aap.2018.01.028.

² Anna E. Kosloski and Bridget Diamond-Welch, “The Men and Women Who Purchase Sex in the United States: Understanding Motives, Practices, and Preferences,” *Women & Criminal Justice* 32, no. 3 (2022): 306-324, doi:10.1080/08974454.2021.1993424; Melissa Farley et al., *Men Who Pay for Sex in Germany and What They Teach us about the Failure of Legal Prostitution: A 6-Country Report on the Sex Trade from the Perspective of the Socially Invisible ‘Freiers’* (Berlin: Prostitution Research & Education, November 2022), 46-47, <https://prostitutionresearch.com>; Rachel Durchslag and Samir Goswami, *Deconstructing The Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights From Interviews With Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, May 2008), 1-34, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Deconstructing-the-Demand-for-Prostitution%20-%20CAASE.pdf>; Melissa Farley, Julie Bindel, and Jacqueline M. Golding, *Men Who Buy Sex: Who They Buy and What They Know* (London: Eaves and Prostitution Research & Education, December 2009), 1-32, <https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/lsidocs/Mensex.pdf>.

³ Charlotte Alter, “Catching Johns: Inside the National Push to Arrest Men Who Buy Sex,” *Time*, n.d., <https://time.com/sex-buyers-why-cops-across-the-u-s-target-men-who-buy-prostitutes/> (accessed March 2, 2023); Nicholas Kristof, “Targeting the Johns in Sex Trade,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/27/opinion/kristof-targeting-the-johns-in-sex-trade.html>; Kristin Pisarcik, “Miami Vice: Inside ‘John Stings’ and Escort Stings,” *ABC News*, March 21, 2008, <https://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=4488667&page=1>; The Associated Press, “Prostitute Customers Posterized,” *The Gainesville Sun*, October 13, 2012, <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/2012/10/14/prostitute-customers-posterized/31836219007/>.

⁴ Thomas A. Loughran, Ray Paternoster, and Douglas B. Weiss, “Chapter 4: Deterrence,” in *The Handbook of Criminological Theory*, ed. Alex R. Piquero (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 50-74, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118512449.ch4>; Raymond Paternoster, “Chapter 3: Perceptual Deterrence Theory,” in *Deterrence, Choice, and Crime, Volume 23*, eds. Daniel S. Nagin, Francis T. Cullen, and Cheryl Lero Jonson, (New York,

Collectively, the evidence is strong that sanctioning arrested sex buyers is likely to deter re-offending, and to also advance “general deterrence” in which awareness of the risk of sanctions can deter crime in the general population – and not just among those who have been arrested and punished.⁵

References

To access information about specific cases and the U.S. cities and counties in which sex buyer drivers licence suspensions have occurred, you may go to www.demand-forum.org, open the “Browse Locations” window, and then select “License Suspension” from the “Tactics” list. You can also click on the sites listed in Table 2, below, to visit the web page for each city or county that has used this tactic. In addition, the U.S. locations in which other sex buyer arrests have occurred may be [mapped](#) on Demand Forum by clicking on the “Choose a Tactic” box and choosing “License Suspension” from the list.

Table 1: Sites with Earliest Known Use of Driver’s License Suspension for Sex Buyers		
Year	City or County	State
1960	Beardstown	IL
1985	Tampa	FL
1989	Boynton Beach	FL
1989	West Palm Beach	FL
1991	Tallahassee	FL
1993	Lakeland	FL
1995	Delray Beach	FL
1997	Clearwater	FL
1999	Trenton	NJ
2000	Kissimmee	FL
2000	Daytona Beach	FL
2006	Richmond	CA

NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2018), 81-106, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351112710>, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781351112710-3/perceptual-deterrence-theory-raymond-paternoster>; Robert Apel and Daniel S. Nagin, “Chapter 7: Perceptual Deterrence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Offender Decision Making*, eds. Wim Bernasco, Jean-Louis van Gelder, and Henk Elffers (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 121-140.

⁵ Robert Apel and Daniel S. Nagin, “Chapter 14: General Deterrence: A Review of Recent Evidence,” in *Crime and Public Policy*, eds. James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 411-436; Anthony A. Braga and David L. Weisburd, “The Effects of Focused Deterrence Strategies on Crime: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of the Empirical Evidence,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 49, no. 3 (2012): 323-358, doi:10.1177/0022427811419368.

Table 2: U.S. Cities and Counties Known to Have Ever Suspended Driver's Licenses of Arrested Sex Buyers

City or County	State
<u>Beardstown</u>	OH
<u>Boynton Beach</u>	FL
<u>Casselberry</u>	FL
<u>Central Falls</u>	RI
<u>Clearwater</u>	FL
<u>Dallas</u>	TX
<u>Daytona Beach</u>	FL
<u>Delray Beach</u>	FL
<u>Dothan</u>	AL
<u>Eatonville</u>	FL
<u>Fort Pierce</u>	FL
<u>Henrico County</u>	VA
<u>Inwood</u>	FL
<u>Kingsport</u>	TN
<u>Kissimmee</u>	FL
<u>Lake Worth</u>	FL
<u>Lakeland</u>	FL
<u>Lealman</u>	FL
<u>Lynnwood</u>	WA
<u>Miami Beach</u>	FL
<u>Milton-Freewater</u>	OR
<u>Oklahoma City</u>	OK
<u>Palm Beach County</u>	FL
<u>Pinellas County</u>	FL
<u>Polk County</u>	FL
<u>Richmond</u>	CA
<u>Sacramento County</u>	CA
<u>Sacramento</u>	CA
<u>St. Paul</u>	MV
<u>Tallahassee</u>	FL
<u>Tampa</u>	FL
<u>Trenton</u>	NJ
<u>Vallejo</u>	CA
<u>West Palm Beach</u>	FL