

My license might be suspended. What can I do?

Author

Northwest Justice Project

Last Review Date

April 17, 2025

Many types of traffic tickets and other situations can cause your Washington state driver's license to be suspended. This explains common causes, the basics about traffic ticket suspensions, and how to get your license reinstated.

How do I check the status of my license?

If you're not sure about the status of your license, **do not drive**. Check the status of your license online by running a search at the Department of Licensing (https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/extdriveses/ESP/NoLogon/_/) (DOL) or call 360-902-3900.

If you call, be patient. Listen to the entire pre-recorded message and follow instructions. You will get through to a person eventually. For either option, you will need your Washington driver's license number and your date of birth.

This information is free to access. You won't need account or login information.

Update your address with DOL to make sure DOL always has the address where you get your mail. You don't want to miss important information about the status of your license.

I just got a traffic ticket, but I can't afford to pay it.

If you recently got a traffic ticket and you're trying to avoid license suspension for unpaid non-criminal traffic fines, you might have options.

Depending on the type of ticket, you may be able to:

- Fight (contest) the ticket and ask for a hearing
- Ask for a payment plan to pay the fine

You should follow the instructions on the notice to respond to the infraction. **Do not ignore your traffic ticket!** Your license can be suspended if you don't respond to a summons or appear at a court hearing for a non-criminal moving violation like speeding.

How do I know if my ticket was criminal or non-criminal?

If you think your license is suspended due to an unpaid ticket, it's important to know what type of ticket you got. It could have been a **non-criminal** traffic ticket or a **criminal** traffic ticket. Different rules apply to each type of ticket.

1. **Non-Criminal traffic tickets.** These are also called "traffic infractions" or "civil" traffic violations. These are tickets for things like speeding, faulty equipment, not having insurance, and parking tickets.

Usually, a **non-criminal infraction** notice will have a fine amount listed on the ticket itself.

If you have unpaid fines related to a non-criminal traffic ticket, you can ask for a payment plan or community service to pay the fine.

You also might be able to get your license back.

2. **Criminal traffic tickets** are traffic violations that are handled in criminal court. These are often also called criminal traffic "convictions." Some types of criminal traffic violations are driving while under the influence (DUI), hit and run, driving with a suspended license and reckless driving.

You have a right to a free public defense lawyer when you appear in court to respond to a criminal traffic offense.

If there's no fine amount listed and the notice says that a court appearance is required, then it is a criminal traffic ticket.

If you have unpaid fines related to a criminal traffic ticket, you can ask for a hearing to reduce your legal financial obligations related to the ticket.

My license is suspended. What should I do to get it reinstated?

First, try to find out why your license is suspended. Register for a free and secure account with the DOL License eXpress (<https://secure.dol.wa.gov/home/>). You will need an email address to activate your account.

Don't have an email address? Call DOL's automated phone line at 360-902-3900.

Once you know why it was suspended, follow the specific steps for your type of situation.

The state suspends a license for a variety of reasons. Each reason has different steps to reinstatement. Choose a link below to read about the steps for your situation.

Some common suspension reasons include:

- [Unpaid criminal traffic fines or convictions](#)
- [Unpaid non-criminal traffic tickets or infractions](#)
- [Behind on child support payments](#)
- [A car accident where you were an uninsured driver](#)
- You can also try to [avoid license suspension for unpaid non-criminal traffic fines](#) if your license isn't suspended yet.

Out of state suspension: If your driver's license from another state is suspended, Washington also suspends your license. This is true even if Washington DOL has issued you a license that looks valid. You must contact that state's driver license agency to find out how to fix your suspension.

My license is suspended, but I need to drive now. What can I do?

Depending on why your license was suspended, you can [apply to DOL for an Occupational/Restricted License or an Interlock Driver License](#) (<https://www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/restricted.html>). You must meet the

eligibility requirements. Financial help is available if you have a low income.

Can I get help paying for the costs of getting my license reinstated?

Maybe. Financial help may be available through community programs such as:

- Department of Social and Health Services TANF/BFT programs
(<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/temporary-assistance-needy-families>)
- Your local social service agency (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-locations>)
- Supportive services programs available through Wellness Clinics
- Vocational rehabilitation programs for people living with disabilities
(<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dvr>)
- Tribal Employment Rights Offices (TERO) or Tribal Social Service Programs
(<https://goia.wa.gov/tribal-directory>)
- Veterans' programs
- Treehouse (<https://www.treehouseforkids.org/our-services/drivers-assistance/>) for youth in foster care

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our [Get legal help](#) page.