



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

DATED: 09.01.2026

CORAM

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE KRISHNAN RAMASAMY

W.P.(MD)No.785 of 2026

and

W.M.P.(MD).No.649 of 2026

M.Chelladurai

... Petitioner

Vs

1. The Regional Transport Officer-cum-Licensing Authority,
Transport Department,
Thoothukudi.

2. The Inspector of Police,
Thoothukudi PS Central Police Station,
Thoothukudi.
Crime No.313 of 2025.

... Respondents

Prayer: Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying to issue a Writ of Mandamus, directing the respondents to forthwith return the petitioner's original Driving License bearing No.TN-33 19970002124 to the petitioner.

For Petitioner

: Mr.A.Rahul

For R-1

: Mr.S,Shanmugavel,
Additional Government Pleader



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

For R-2

: Mr.A.Albert James,
Government Advocate
(Criminal Side)

ORDER

This Writ Petition has been filed seeking a direction to the respondents to forthwith return the petitioner's original Driving License bearing No.TN-33 19970002124 to the petitioner.

2. It is the case of the petitioner that he is working as a Driver in the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (Coimbatore) Limited. The original driving licence of the petitioner was seized by the second respondent on 26.11.2025 alleging that the bus bearing Registration No.TN 33 N 3535, driven by the petitioner on 23.11.2025, was involved in a fatal accident resulting in the death of a pedestrian, pursuant to which an FIR was registered in Crime No.313 of 2025, and thereafter, his driving licence was handed over to the first respondent. In this regard, the petitioner submitted a representation to the respondents on 31.12.2025, however, the same has not been considered till date. Hence, the petitioner has approached this Court by filing the present Writ Petition.



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

3. Under similar circumstances, in the case of ***K.Perumal vs. the Regional Transport Officer, Virudhunagar (W.P.(MD) No.9605 of 2022, dated 12.05.2022)***, this Court has observed as follows:

" 7.This Court perused the Motor Vehicles Act and unable to get anything of the power of the respondents to impound the driving licence. On the other hand, the first respondent has the power to cancel the license, under certain circumstances. In the present case, not even a show cause notice was issued to the petitioner. Without issuing any show cause notice to the petitioner, the driving licence was seized on 02.04.2022 and till date retained by the first respondent without any authority. At this juncture, this Court would like to extract the relevant portion of the judgment of the Hon'ble Division Bench of this Court in W.A.(MD) No. 176 of 2009 dealing with the powers of the authorities to impound the driving licence as below:-

'5.Therefore the question that falls for consideration in this appeal is as to whether the respondent has a power to impound the driving licence of a person involved in a road traffic accident.

6.Section 19(1) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, empowers the Licensing Authority to disqualify a person for holding or obtaining any driving licence for a specified period or to revoke any such licence. Similarly, a Court which convicts a person for an offence under the Act, is empowered by Section 20(1) to disqualify such person from holding a driving licence for a specific period. Section 21 makes a driving licence become suspended, if the holder of the licence had been previously convicted of an offence punishable under Section 184 and a case had been registered against him on the allegation of causing the death or grievous injury to one or more persons by dangerous driving. Section 22 empowers the Court to cancel or suspend the



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W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

driving licence, upon conviction of a person for an offence under Section 184.

7.Obviously, Sections 20 and 22 are not applicable to the case on hand, since the action impugned in the writ petition did not arise out of the disqualification ordered by a Court. There is no allegation that the appellant was previously convicted for an offence under Section 184. Therefore, Section 21 also has no application to the case on hand Consequently, the only provision to which the respondent could restore to, is Section 19.

8.Section 19 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, reads as follows:-

“19.Power of licensing authority to disqualify from holding a driving licence or revoke such lince.

(1) If a licensing authority is satisfied, after giving the holder of a driving licence an opportunity of being heard, that he-

(a) is a habitual criminal or a habitual drunkard; or

(b) is a habitual addict to any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance within the meaning of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (61 of 1985); or

(c) is using or has used a motor vehicle in the commission of a cognizable offence; or

(d) has by his previous conduct as driver of a motor vehicle shown that his driving is likely to be attended with danger to the public; or

(e) has obtained any driving licence or a licence to drive a particular class or description of motor vehicle by fraud or misrepresentation; or

(f) has committed any such act which is likely to cause nuisance or danger to the public, as may be prescribed by the Central Government, having regard to the objects of this



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

Act; or

(g) has failed to submit to, or has not passed, the tests referred to in the proviso to sub-section (3) of section 22; or

(h) being a person under the age of eighteen years who has been granted a learner's licence or a driving licence with the consent in writing of the person having the care of the holder of the licence and has ceased to be in such care, it may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, make an order-

(i) disqualifying that person for a specified period for holding or obtaining any driving licence to drive all or any classes or descriptions of vehicles specified in the licence;

or

(ii) revoke any such licence.

(2) Where an order under sub-section (1) is made, the holder of a driving licence shall forthwith surrender his driving licence to the licensing authority making the order, if the driving licence has not already been surrendered, and the licensing authority shall,-

(a) if the driving licence is a driving licence issued under this Act, keep it until the disqualification has expired or has been removed; or

(b) if it is not a driving licence issued under this Act, endorse the disqualification upon it and send it to the licensing authority by which it was issued; or

(c) in the case of revocation of any licence, endorse the revocation upon it and if it is not the authority which issued the same, intimate the fact of revocation to the authority which issued that licence:

Provided that where the driving licence of a person authorises him to drive more than one class or description of motor vehicles and the order, made under sub-section (1),



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

disqualifies him from driving any specified class or description of motor vehicles, the licensing authority shall endorse the disqualification upon the driving licence and return the same to the holder.

(3) Any person aggrieved by an order made by a licensing authority under sub-section (1) may, within thirty days of the receipt of the order, appeal to the prescribed authority, and such appellate authority shall give notice to the licensing authority and hear either party if so required by that party and may pass such order as it thinks fit and an order passed by any such appellate authority shall be final.”

9.A bare reading of Section 19(1) shows that the Licensing Authority has the power to revoke any licence or disqualify a person for a specified period from holding or obtaining a driving licence, if any of the contingencies prescribed in Clauses (a) to (h) of Sub Section (1) of Section 19 arises. Moreover, the power under Section 19(1) can be invoked only after giving an opportunity of being heard to the holder of the licence and for reasons to be recorded in writing.

10.But in the case on hand, the licence of the appellant has been impounded or retained by the respondent, immediately after the accident on 18.3.2009. Admittedly, the show cause notice was issued only on 28.4.2009. Therefore, it is clear that the driving licence was retained, both without an order in writing and without affording an opportunity of being heard to the appellant. This is a clear violation of the provisions of the statute and hence the order of the learned Judge, dismissing the writ petition deserves to be set aside.'

8.On a perusal of the above judgment would reveal that the authorities have no power to impound the driving licence, but they can



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

take action for cancellation of licence. But, in the present case, without issuing any show cause notice, the driving licence was impounded. In view of the law settled by the Division Bench of this Court, this Court is of the view that without any authority, the respondents cannot retain the driving licence and they have to return the same to the petitioner. Hence, this Court directs the respondents to return the driving licence to the petitioner on or before 18.05.2022."

4. In view of the same, there is no provision under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, to impound the driving licence. If such being the case, the seizure of licence and keeping the same with the first respondent is not in accordance with law and the issue was also decided, thus said issue is no longer *res integra*. Hence, the first respondent is directed to hand over the licence of the petitioner to him within a period of one (1) week from the date of receipt of a copy of this order.

5. Accordingly, this Writ Petition is disposed of. No costs. Consequently, the connected miscellaneous petition is closed.

09.01.2026

Index : Yes/No
Internet: Yes/No
Neutral Citation: Yes/No

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7/9



W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

To

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Transport Department,
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W.P.(MD) No.785 of 2026

KRISHNAN RAMASAMY, J.

TSG

W.P.(MD)No.785 of 2026

09.01.2026