



March 19, 2020

Governor Ron DeSantis
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32309

Re: COVID-19 - Fines and Fees Impacts on Florida Communities

Dear Governor DeSantis:

The Fines and Fees Justice Center is writing to urge you to consider taking immediate action to proactively address the consequences of COVID-19 on individuals who owe fines, fees, and other court debt.

The escalating public health and economic crisis wrought by COVID-19 is unlike anything in modern U.S. history. The worst harms of this crisis are falling heavily and disproportionately on the most vulnerable people in our country, especially people living paycheck-to-paycheck and people in the criminal justice system.

An [analysis](#) by Florida Politics shows that “[m]ore than 1 million Floridians work in jobs that are tied to tourism, hotels, restaurants, bars, and other places likely hit hard by the shutdowns that have come just in the past week because of the spread of the new coronavirus” and that these workers “are facing a nearly total collapse of Florida’s tourism, lodging, hospitality, and entertainment economy.”

In light of this ongoing emergency and the economic impacts to our state, Florida should make immediate changes to their criminal, traffic and municipal ordinance fines and fees policies to (1) increase public safety and health, (2) ensure that fines and fees are not a barrier to people’s basic needs throughout this emergency, and (3) promote the resiliency of our communities.

Just today, the Hillsborough County Clerk of Court [announced](#) that financial due dates for all criminal and traffic cases will be extended for an additional 60 days. While this is an excellent first step by one county, a statewide policy is imperative to help stem this public health and economic crisis. Listed below are steps you can take to address these issues. One bears special emphasis. Roughly 2 million Floridians currently have their licenses suspended. During this emergency, Floridians need to be able to drive to access food and medical care and to get to work, if they have a job that requires them to be present, while practicing social-distancing.

Immediate Recommendations For All Florida Communities:

1. End all collection of fines, fees, and court debt for at least 60 days and reviewed as needed.



2. Stop sending delinquent cases to private collection companies and instruct those companies to cease any collection efforts.
3. Stop imposing penalties for late or missed payments of fines, fees, and court debt.
4. Suspend interest on unpaid fines, fees, and court debt.
5. FLHSMV should cease processing driver's license suspensions if the underlying reason is unpaid fines or fees.
6. Law enforcement officers should release individuals with a warning who are driving on a suspended license. Alternatively, law enforcement should cite and release any person apprehended for driving on a suspended driver's license, when the underlying suspension is based on unpaid fines and fees or not appearing in court. Under no circumstances should these individuals be arrested and jailed.

Thank you for doing all you can do to alleviate the impacts of COVID-19 across Florida. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

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Cc:

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