

TO Interested Parties

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RE: Voter Views of Proposals to Reform Fines and Fees in the Justice System

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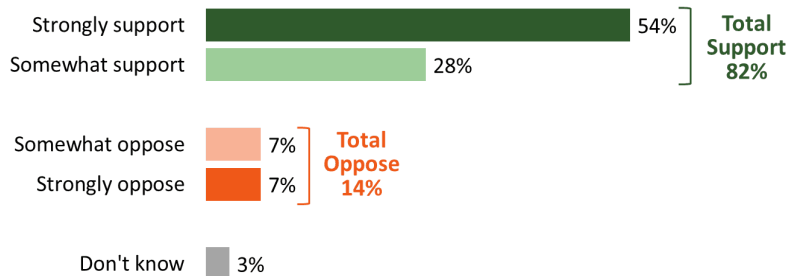
The bipartisan research team of FM3 Research (D) and American Viewpoint (R) recently completed a survey¹ of voters nationwide assessing their opinions of the criminal justice system and views of potential reforms to fines and fees. **The study found broad support for a variety of reforms, including suspending collection of fines and fees until the coronavirus pandemic is over; reducing or replacing fines generally; and stopping the suspension of driver's licenses as punishment for not paying fines and fees.** This is undergirded by their sense that the criminal justice system should be funded by all Americans -- not just those accused of a crime -- and that governments should not be looking to backstop budget gaps by issuing tickets.

Key findings include:

- **Four in five Americans support delaying fine and fee collection during the coronavirus pandemic.** As shown in Figure 1 below, voters overwhelmingly support (82%) pausing collection of fines and fees until the economic impacts of the pandemic have abated -- and more than half (54%) "strongly support" such a proposal.

Figure 1: Support for Delaying on Fine and Fee Collection During the Pandemic

In some places, governments have stopped collecting fines and fees during the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis. Do you support or oppose allowing people to wait to pay their fines and fees until after the economic crisis is over?



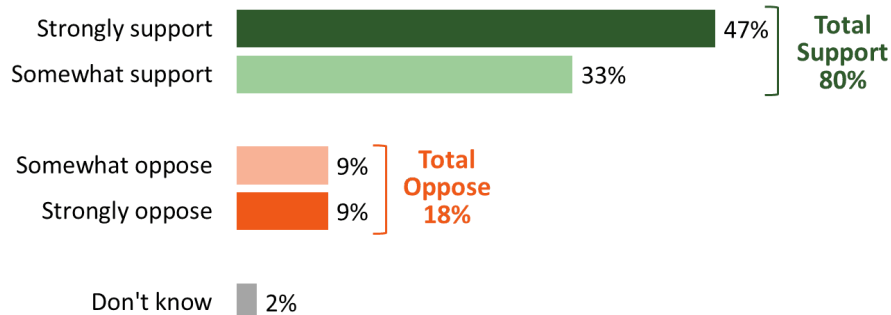
¹ **Methodology:** From Sept. 26-Oct. 12, 2020, FM3 and American Viewpoint completed 1,005 interviews (online and via landlines and cell phones) with randomly selected United States voters likely to participate in the November 2020 election; this is inclusive of oversamples of 100 interviews each in Florida, Nevada, New York and New Mexico. Data were weighted to their true proportions by geography. The margin of sampling error is +/-4.0% at the 95% confidence level. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.

- **Four in five voters support reducing or replacing fines for minor violations of the law.** As shown in Figure 2, 80% of American voters support reducing or replacing fines with alternatives like community service, drug treatment or job training -- and nearly half (47%) "strongly support" this proposal. Fewer than one in five (18%) oppose the idea.

Figure 2: Support for Reducing or Replacing Fines

Some people have proposed that we reduce or replace fines for these less-serious violations of the law with alternatives like community service, drug treatment or job training.

Does this sound like something you would support or oppose?



- **By a margin of nearly three to one, voters believe everyone should pay for the justice system because it supposed to serve everyone.** Three-quarters (74%) of voters are more likely to agree with the statement that the justice system "should be paid for by everyone," rather than an assertion that only those who are charged with a crime should bear responsibility for funding the system.

Figure 3: Who Should Pay for the Justice System

Statement	% Chosen
The justice system serves everyone by keeping the community safe, resolving disputes, and enforcing rights and responsibilities. It should be paid for by everyone.	74%
The justice system exists to address the actions of people who break the law. Only people charged with a crime or who get a traffic ticket should be required to pay for the justice system.	22%
Both/Neither/Don't know	4%

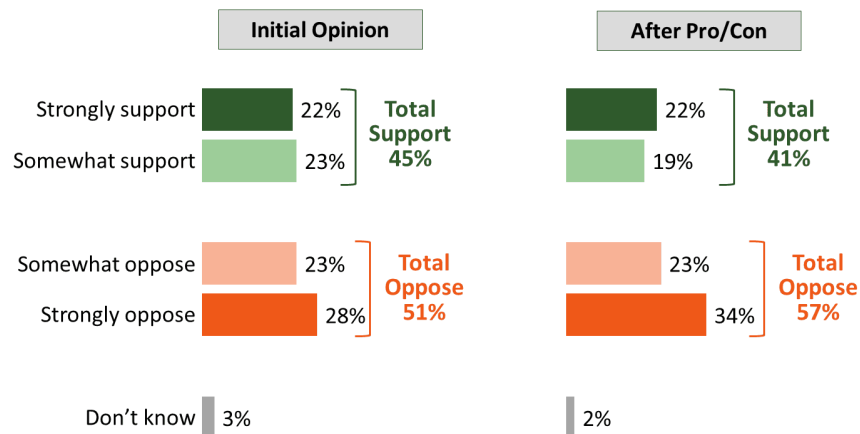
- **A majority opposes suspending driver's licenses for nonpayment of fines and fees -- and the margin of opposition grows after a brief exchange of pro and con messages.** Figure 4 shows voter opinions of driver's license suspension as a punishment for not paying fines and fees: half (51%) initially oppose this practice, a six-point margin. However, after a brief exchange of rationales for and against suspensions, the margin opposed widens to 16 points, with more than one-third (34%) "strongly opposed."

Figure 4: Support for Suspending Driver's Licenses of People Who Do Not Pay Fines or Fees

In most US states, the government suspends someone's driver's license when they do not pay their fines or fees on time, if someone can't afford to pay them. Do you support or oppose suspending the driver's licenses of people who do not pay their fines or fees?

Supporters of driver's license suspensions say that losing your driver's license is the government's most-effective tool for collecting fines and fees. People need to drive, so suspending a driver's license motivates people to pay. While it's not as severe as putting someone in jail, it still sends a strong message about the importance of paying the money owed.

Opponents say that if someone can't drive, they won't be able to pay their fines and fees. They can't get to work, take their children to school, buy groceries, or get the healthcare they need. The data shows that most driver's license suspensions happen simply because people can't afford to pay fines and fees.



- **Voters also strongly oppose policing for profit.** By a 63-point margin, voters believe that government budget gaps should not be filled by ticket quotas (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Opinion of Filling Budget Gaps with Tickets

Statement	% Chosen
Government revenue should not depend on making people pay more for minor offenses or traffic violations, because it gives police an incentive to write more tickets.	79%
When state and local governments are facing major budget gaps, writing more tickets for minor offenses or traffic violations is an appropriate way to raise money.	16%
Both/Neither/Don't know	6%

In sum, American voters support policies to address the harms of fines and fees in the justice system. They support reducing or replacing fines and fees for minor violations of the law, as well as delaying collection of fines and fees until the economy has recovered from the coronavirus recession. They also oppose driver's license suspensions for people who can't afford to pay fines and fees. These positions align with voters' belief that the justice system should be funded by everyone and that government revenue should not depend on policing-for-profit with fines, fees, and tickets.