

Fines and fees are bad business for Florida.

Our state needs smarter investments.

Imposing and collecting court fines and fees is bad business for Florida. They waste taxpayer money, law enforcement's time, and needlessly punish hard-working fathers, mothers and young people. Instead of bringing in revenue to the state, these backwards fines and fees policies are taking away basic freedoms like driving and working, stunting our economy.

Current fines and fees laws stop people from working, driving and paying debt.

If you can't afford to make a fine or fee payment, Florida takes your license and, with it, your freedom to drive and work. Given Florida's unreliable public transportation, losing your license makes everyday tasks like caring for your children or buying groceries almost impossible. Needless license suspensions also cause businesses to lose hard-working employees just because it's illegal for them to drive to work.

Why this policy does not work:

- License suspensions make it nearly impossible for an individual to pay their debts.
- People are forced to drive without a legal license - and often without insurance - solely because of debts.
- Licenses that are suspended for unpaid court debt stay suspended for a long time; it can be years before these safe drivers can afford to get back on the road, if ever.

The smarter investment for Florida:

- Stop suspending licenses for unpaid court fines and fees. This will help individuals obtain employment, access healthcare, care for their families and contribute to the Florida economy.
- Collections will increase if people are able to work. In Florida, counties that don't suspend for criminal court debt averaged a 5% increase in collections over the counties that use suspensions.

Today's payment plans don't comply with standards for affordability set in statute.

Florida law states that a payment plan based on 2% of a person's average monthly income is how much a person can afford to pay on a payment plan — but no one is using this standard.

Why this policy does not work:

- The 2% affordability standard could work if it was made mandatory. Instead, current payment plan terms include large down payments and high monthly payments, setting people up to fail and denying them a fair chance to pay their debt.

The smarter investment for Florida:

- Payment plans must take into account each person's income and circumstances. The affordability standard must be made mandatory.

Under the current model, private collections are high pain and low gain.

Florida law requires court fines and fees to be sent to private collection agencies after 90 days of nonpayment. An additional collections fee — up to 40% — gets added on to the amount already owed. Private collections agencies often require payment in full and do not have payment options.

Why this policy does not work:

- Due to the additional fees imposed, private collections make it even harder for individuals to pay the debts that they owe.
- A majority of the criminal court debt sent to collections is uncollectible.

The smarter investment for Florida:

- Collections costs should be absorbed by the government.
- Standards for collections agencies should incorporate basic consumer protections, allow for partial payments, and only be used in cases where an individual has a demonstrated ability to pay.

Juvenile justice fees put young people in debt before they can even work.

In the juvenile justice system, children and their families are billed for their involvement with the courts. These practices do not set them up for success in life as adults.

Why this policy does not work:

- Juveniles who owe debts have higher recidivism rates, stay on probation longer, are unable to expunge their records, obtain driver's licenses, participate in job corps programs or enroll in the military because they are assessed fines and fees they cannot afford to pay. The majority of those affected are young boys, many of whom come from poor families.
- Juveniles are either too young to work, can't find work, or it interferes with school and family obligations.

The smarter investment for Florida:

- End the assessment of fines and fees against juveniles and discharge all previously assessed fines and fees.

Fines and fees are an inadequate, unreliable source of revenue.

Court fines and fees are largely uncollectible and the limited collections are directed to over 40 different trust funds that support a wide range of government services and projects, including the Clerks of Court. The result is Florida wastes money chasing money that doesn't exist and hard-working Floridians are continuously punished with more fees and license suspensions. The Florida legislature must provide for the full operating budget of all essential offices of the justice system including clerks, courts, public defenders, and state attorneys through general revenue.