

Roadmap to Bold and Equitable Fine and Fee Reform



Contents

1.0	Introduction	page 3
1.1	The Opportunity	page 4
1.2	Equitable Fine and Fee Reform	page 5
1.3	Membership in Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice	page 5
2.0	Developing and Enacting a Fine and Fee Reform Agenda	page 7
2.1	Building Your Team	page 8
2.2	Conducting a Fine and Fee Assessment	page 9
2.3	Developing a Fine and Fee Reform Plan	page 11
2.4	Enacting and Implementing Reform	page 12
3.0	Appendix A: Examples of Local Fine and Fee Reform	page 13

Introduction

Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice is a national network supporting local leaders to move meaningful fine and fee reforms that work better for people and for government. Through the network, cities and counties have a unique opportunity to lead local teams that advance cutting-edge policies, engage with experts and peers from across the country, and catalyze a national movement of cities and counties that are implementing practical and impactful models of reform, which can be replicated easily by other places.

This guide is intended for member teams of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice, but it is also a resource for anyone interested in fine and fee reform, particularly leaders in other cities and counties who are eager to address the widespread challenges presented by excessive fines and fees in their jurisdictions.

1.1

The Opportunity

State and local governments have become increasingly reliant on fines and fees as a potential source of revenue. Fines and fees have increased in size and severity, and often exceed people's ability to pay them. In an extensive [report](#), National Public Radio found that since 2010, 48 states have increased criminal and civil court fees. [Local governments](#) also increasingly attempt to fund their operations through steep fines and fees, which many people cannot afford to pay.

The often insidious, unintended impact of this practice is to perpetuate and exacerbate poverty. When people cannot pay fines or fees, a cascade of consequences sets in. Late fees are added, credit scores are impacted, access to housing and employment is diminished, and, in most places, driver's licenses are suspended. People can even be jailed for nonpayment. Fines and fees disproportionately impact low-income people and people of color. Thus, fines and fees can make government a driver of inequality, not the equalizer that it should be. Charging people fines and fees is often a "lose-lose" for people and for governments—because people often cannot afford to pay, governments may gain little from attempting to collect these fines and fees. Both the [White House Council of Economic Advisors](#) for the Obama Administration and the [Conference of State Court Administrators](#) found that fines and fees are often an ineffective and inefficient means of raising revenue.

Across the country, city and county leaders are recognizing the urgent need to address this problem and are advancing bold reforms to ensure their fines, fees, and other financial penalties do not place a disproportionate burden on low-income residents and people of color. These leaders are implementing reforms that advance racial equity, make a difference in the lives of residents, increase economic prosperity, and are feasible for government to implement. The local officials driving these reforms are united by several core beliefs:

1. It is possible to hold people accountable without putting them in financial distress.
2. People with lower incomes should not face more severe consequences than middle- and upper-income residents.
3. Governments should not balance their books on the backs of their most distressed communities.

The 2008 recession was a catalyst for many cities and counties to turn to fines and fees to try to balance their budgets, further harming residents who were already struggling to make ends meet. Although the economy rebounded in many ways, many people in the United States were still struggling. Now, the current COVID-19 crisis has created unparalleled hardships for both governments and individuals across the country, and the crisis is creating even more urgency to prioritize fine and fee reform. Our goal through Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice is to support local leaders through this crisis and provide a roadmap that guides places to protect vulnerable citizens in a sustainable, equitable way.



1.2

Equitable Fine and Fee Reform

Equity—just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential—is a pragmatic approach to solve the nation’s greatest sources of tension: economic inequality and racial exclusion. Equity addresses race forthrightly and productively, but it is not about benefiting one group at the expense of another. When the wisdom, voice, and experience of those traditionally absent from policymaking—often low-income people and people of color—drive the process, profound policy transformations and smart, sustainable strategies tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable communities emerge, [improving outcomes for all](#).

Equitable approaches and impacts should be considered throughout fine and fee reform work and incorporated in at least two important ways:

1. Ensure that individuals and communities most directly impacted by fines and fees are meaningfully represented in all phases of your reform work, including assessing your jurisdiction’s use of fines and fees, prioritizing the fines and fees to address, developing and passing specific policies, and implementing and evaluating those policies.
2. Conduct a [racial equity impact assessment](#) of any policy you intend to promote. In other words, analyze all potential impacts of the policy to ensure that the communities who are most impacted will not be affected adversely.

Employing an equity framework is the best way to ensure a fair and smart policy approach and to guard against unintended consequences. It maximizes buy-in from the communities you are serving and protects the impact you seek from pervasive, often unseen, biases built into systems and mindsets.

1.3

Membership in Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice

PolicyLink, The San Francisco Financial Justice Project, and the Fines and Fees Justice Center launched Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice to support localities working to develop and implement policies that make a difference in the lives of low-income residents. The inaugural cohort of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice is made up of 10 local teams who are innovating and taking a leadership role in advancing fair and just policies to reform fines, fees, tickets, and financial penalties that often have an adverse and disproportionate impact on low-income people and people of color.

The inaugural cohort of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice includes the following cities and counties:

- Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
- Chicago, Illinois
- Dallas, Texas
- Durham, North Carolina
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Providence, Rhode Island
- Sacramento/Sacramento County, California
- Seattle/King County, Washington
- Shelby County, Tennessee
- St. Paul, Minnesota

In addition to this step-by-step roadmap containing policy and communications best practices, Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice teams receive the following supports:

- An award of \$50,000 to help advance each team’s fine and fee reform efforts
- Monthly video conferences between partner organizations and each team to respond to questions and requests for technical assistance, to brainstorm solutions to overcome obstacles, and to assess progress

- Webinars with experts in the field to present deep dives into relevant topics:
 - Engaging community and government stakeholders to conduct fine and fee assessments
 - Effective framing and messaging
 - Understanding budget and revenue considerations
 - Developing, passing, and implementing policy agendas
- Cohort-wide video conferences and a listserv for teams to facilitate communication, exchange information, share progress, and engage in collective problem-solving
- Ongoing technical assistance on an as-needed basis
- Support with media relations, framing, templates, and communications best practices

Participating cities and counties will complete the proposed process (detailed in the next section, “Developing and Enacting a Fine and Fee Reform Agenda”), participate in all network events, including calls and webinars (see Appendix B for calendar), and mentor current and future cohort members by sharing their experiences. Ultimately, as part of their participation in the network, each team will develop and implement at least three fine and fee reforms that will create momentum and catalyze similar reforms across the country. By the end of the grant period, this network of cities and counties will create innovative models of effective reforms, serve as national leaders, and inspire localities across the country to join future cohorts who will do the same.

2.0

Developing and Enacting a Fine and Fee Reform Agenda

This section outlines the basic elements required for Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice teams to assess and reform fines and fees in their jurisdictions:

- Building your team
- Conducting a fine and fee assessment
- Developing a fine and fee reform plan
- Enacting and implementing reforms

In some cases, teams may have already completed certain elements and/or have the authority and opportunity to pass reforms before all elements are complete. We encourage all teams, however, to carefully review this section to ensure that all considerations—particularly those related to equity and community engagement—have been assessed and implemented.

The reports by The San Francisco Financial Justice Project—[San Francisco Fines & Fees Task Force: Initial Findings And Recommendations](#) and the just-released [Advancing Financial Justice in San Francisco: The Experience and Lessons of the City's Financial Justice Project](#)—describe the project's work to accomplish the elements outlined in this section and model valuable best practices.



2.1

Building Your Team

Cohort members should consider expanding the teams outlined in their applications to join Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice. Building a team that includes a wide range of government and community stakeholders and diverse perspectives is a foundational element of any reform effort. Important strategies for building a successful team include the following:

- **Ensure your team has the capacity and authority needed to advance reform.** If possible, teams should recruit members with the authority and/or influence to change policies and/or processes. Teams should also identify and include other key government stakeholders. Multiple government agencies, departments, branches, and offices may have essential information and/or authority. Their work and budgets may also be impacted by your reform efforts. If they are not willing or able to join the teams, try to obtain their support for your efforts. Teams should consider engaging budget and finance leaders and departments that directly oversee the fines and fees they may address, such as transit, law enforcement, and court leaders.

Fine and fee reform efforts require a number of critical tasks, including data collection, fiscal analysis, community engagement, strategic communications, and sometimes legal research and analysis. Your team should include members who can perform one or more of these tasks. Importantly, team members should have the time to contribute and team coordinators should have the capacity and focus necessary to ensure that the team's efforts do not stall.

- **Include impacted individuals and community-based organizations who work with impacted individuals on your team.** Impacted individuals and community members are best positioned to understand the real-world impact of fines and fees and, as a result, are critical to developing effective policy and implementation. They may also serve as a bridge to similarly situated community members who can act as powerful advocates for your reform agenda.

To truly be equitable, the inclusion of impacted individuals and communities must be authentic and meaningful. Teams should develop structures and processes to ensure that the voices and ideas of impacted individuals are centered in decision-making; these structures should include access considerations, such as meeting times, language, cultural responsiveness, disability, and technology.



2.2

Conducting a Fine and Fee Assessment

Assessing your jurisdiction's fines and fees is a critical part of the equitable reform process. Fines and fees can be opaque and their individual and aggregated impact on communities may be unknown to many within government. A fine and fee assessment can help your team develop a better understanding of the universe of fines and fees your jurisdiction is imposing, as well as the impact fines and fees have on communities and government. The assessment process can also provide an opportunity to begin building relationships with internal and external stakeholders who may be critical to the success of your reform efforts.

As a first step, teams should review the landscape of successful reforms from across the country—found in Appendix A to this guide and in the Fines and Fees Justice Center's [Clearinghouse](#)—to determine whether similar fines and fees exist in their jurisdictions.

A fine and fee assessment consists of four elements: community engagement, government stakeholder engagement, examining authority, and fiscal analysis.

Community engagement

A critical step of the assessment process is engaging impacted individuals to understand which fines and fees are causing harm. It is also important to develop an understanding about how imposing and collecting fines and fees impacts real people. If done properly, the community engagement process will yield valuable information about fines, fees, and collections practices and help build trust and establish relationships with community members. Strategies for meaningfully engaging community include the following:

- **Collaborate with organizations serving impacted individuals.** As a first step, you should identify organizations that serve and have gained the trust of impacted individuals and communities. Such organizations might include faith-based institutions, legal services agencies, reentry organizations, homelessness service providers and advocates, criminal justice reform advocates, and grassroots organizations working with impacted individuals. Jurisdictions should work with the organizations identified to determine how best to engage individuals and communities.

- **Strengthen the capacity of community-based and grassroots organizations to participate.** Many community-based and grassroots organizations have limited resources and capacity. Where possible, teams should provide financial support and work with those organizations to secure additional resources that could enhance their ability to play an effective role in the community-engagement process.
- **Address barriers to meaningful community participation.** Many impacted individuals face financial and other barriers to participating in the policy reform process, such as the access considerations listed above. A lack of childcare, for example, may prevent a parent from participating in an after-hours community meeting. Inadequate translation services may discourage participation by impacted non-English speakers. Working with community partners, jurisdictions should identify and address these barriers. Jurisdictions should also provide creative ways to increase community input. For example, your team could provide ways for technology, art, storytelling, social media, and/or video to engage community members. There are simple, straightforward ways to build trust and relationships with community members that lead to more and better community input. We will cover these approaches in more detail throughout the course of your network participation.



Government stakeholder engagement

Another critical step is for teams to gather basic information regarding fines, fees, and collection practices from key government stakeholders. Fines or fees that community members are struggling with may be managed or collected by different government departments or agencies and different levels of government. Similarly, revenue generated from fines and fees may be distributed across departments. Jurisdictions should seek the following information from relevant agencies and departments:

- ✓ Name and description of the fine/fee
- ✓ How the fine/fee is assessed, including whether an ability-to-pay process must take place (and any parameters for the ability-to-pay process)
- ✓ Consequences of late payment or nonpayment, including late fees, penalties (e.g., driver's license suspensions), and other adverse actions
- ✓ Dollar amount of each imposed fee and fine compared to revenue collected (for at least the last two fiscal years)
- ✓ Percentage of fines and fees paid on time
- ✓ Fine/fee revenue budgeted (for at least the last two fiscal years)
- ✓ Number of fines/fees issued and amount imposed in the last complete fiscal year
- ✓ Number of distinct individuals paying the fine/fee and amount paid in the last complete fiscal year
- ✓ Demographic data, if available, regarding the individuals who were assessed the fine/fee in the last complete fiscal year
- ✓ Who manages the collections of fines/fees for the agency or department
- ✓ Collection practices and the use of other private or public collection mechanisms, such as wage garnishment, tax refund intercepts, or employment of private debt collectors
- ✓ Cost of collecting fine/fee revenue for at least the last two fiscal years; to determine the true cost of collecting fine/fee revenue, jurisdictions should consider all expenses associated with collections, including the following:
 - Expenses paid to third-party debt collectors
 - Cost of government staff time devoted to collections activity
 - Cost of related in-court proceedings
 - Cost to parole and probation systems for fee and fine enforcement
 - Cost of processing license suspensions or state tax agencies processing offsets
 - Cost to law enforcement for warrant enforcement or arrests for failure to pay or for suspended driver's licenses

- Costs associated with incarcerating individuals for the nonpayment of fines or fees
- Costs to public defender systems for addressing their clients' fees and fines

Two reports, [*The Steep Costs of Criminal Justice Fees and Fines*](#) and [*Cost of Injustice: How Criminal System Fees Are Hurting Los Angeles County Families*](#), provide more context on the true cost of collecting fines and fees.

It is likely not possible to collect all of the information suggested in the above list, but the lack of perfect information should not preclude jurisdictions from moving forward with reform—rather, jurisdictions should collect as much information as possible from government partners and flesh out the picture by hearing from directly impacted community members.

Strategies for gathering information from government stakeholders include the following:

- **Secure buy-in from relevant government stakeholders early in the process and consider bringing them to the table.** Invite agencies or departments that assess or collect fines or fees to join teams or otherwise engage them early in the reform process to secure important buy-in. Creating partnerships early on will aid in securing necessary information and collaboration.
- **Engage and build relationships with relevant government staff through the information-gathering process.** Staff may be able to provide insights and context that cannot be gleaned solely from reviewing data and documents, such as information about how a fine or fee is actually imposed by the government. The internal information-gathering process also offers an opportunity to build relationships with people in departments or agencies who may have expert knowledge about fine and fee systems.
- **Leverage existing government processes or authority to secure information.** Teams should examine whether there are existing processes to secure information about fines or fees. For example, The San Francisco Financial Justice Project partnered with the Mayor's Budget Office to solicit information about fines and fees assessed by each department through the annual budget process. Jurisdictions may also consider using existing authority within the executive or legislative branches to mandate that relevant agencies provide information regarding fines and fees.

Examining authority

No jurisdiction is likely to have the authority to modify every fine or fee impacting its residents. Therefore, it is critical that teams assess who has the authority to reform any fines or fees under consideration for reform. This information will be valuable in helping to identify target reforms and to determine whether teams will need to work with officials at other levels of government to advance reform.

Jurisdictions may incorrectly assume that certain fines and fees are under the purview of courts or state law. It is important to conduct basic research to ensure accuracy about what authority your team and its allies may have. One strategy is to partner with an academic institution or other nonprofit organization to research legal authority. For example, a law school may be willing to analyze your jurisdiction's authority to modify identified fines or fees. Partnering with these types of institutions may lead to additional capacity for other research needs as well. Another option is to consult government personnel, such as a city attorney or county counsel, to conduct the necessary research and analysis.

Fiscal analysis

Using the information gathered during the assessment, teams should conduct an analysis to understand the true impact of each fine and fee assessed, including understanding how much revenue is actually collected, the costs of collections and collections rate, and any collateral consequences, such as arrests for failure to appear or lost revenue due to suspended driver's licenses. This analysis may help make the case that targeted fines and fees are harmful and ineffective.

2.3

Developing a Fine and Fee Reform Plan

Teams should work closely with other community partners and government stakeholders to consider the following key questions and target specific fines or fees for a reform agenda:

- Was the fine or fee identified as harmful by impacted individuals and community members?
- Does the fine or fee lead to inequitable outcomes? Does it exacerbate existing racial and socioeconomic disparities?
- Does the fine and/or the underlying "offense" for which it is imposed accomplish an important government purpose? Could the "offense" be decriminalized or abolished altogether?
- Does the net revenue from the fee justify the harm it causes?
- Does a one-size-fits-all fee or fine make sense?
- What is the financial impact of the fine or fee on government? Is your jurisdiction spending as much or more to collect the fee as it is taking in?
- Is implementing the fine or fee a good use of government resources? Or could those resources be deployed, to greater benefit, elsewhere?
- What are the revenue implications of eliminating a fee or decriminalizing or adjusting a fine?

Once teams have selected specific fine and fee targets, they should identify the reform approach for each target. Fines are intended to punish and deter certain behaviors, while fees are a regressive tax that is assessed to raise revenue. However, fines and fees may not accomplish their goals and may even undermine them.

In every case, teams should consider eliminating the fine or fee and determine whether other policy interventions that do not cause harmful impacts on communities can accomplish a policy goal. Fees should not be utilized in the criminal-legal context and any existing fees should be eliminated. Teams should consider eliminating fees in other contexts as well, particularly if they disproportionately impact low-income individuals or people of color.

Fines are also often disproportionately imposed on and collected from low-income individuals or people of color. One solution is to stop sanctioning the conduct in question and to eliminate the fine. If the fine serves a critical public safety purpose and is a proven deterrent, cities and counties should consider whether they can equitably impose the fine. In some cases, alternatives should be considered, such as waiving a fine if an individual enrolls in academic classes or engages in community service. These alternatives should be feasible for individuals to satisfy.

If the above approaches are not appropriate or feasible, teams can consider establishing a rigorous ability-to-pay process. Jurisdictions pursuing this reform approach must ensure that a mechanism exists to ensure relevant agencies and departments actually conduct the ability-to-pay determinations, that the ability-to-pay process considers all relevant data without imposing undue burdens on either courts or individuals, and that determinations are consistent and unbiased.

2.4

Enacting and Implementing Reform

As with all prior elements, teams must work closely with impacted individuals, community partners, and government allies to develop and advance a persuasive case for reform.

Often, the most persuasive cases for reform come from the stories of individuals and families struggling with the burden of fines and fees. Teams should ensure that impacted individuals who are willing and interested have the opportunity to share their stories in support of reform. Impacted individuals may testify at key hearings and/or at meetings with key government stakeholders. The team may need to provide travel support and/or stipends to assist impacted individuals with travel to hearings and meetings. Jurisdictions should also explore creative ways to help impacted individuals share their stories, including using video.

Government agencies and departments can also serve as powerful advocates for reform efforts and will be key to implementation, particularly in cases where they have the authority over the target fine or fee. Teams should leverage relationships built throughout the reform process to enlist government stakeholders to participate in the advocacy process, including by providing supportive testimony in key hearings.

Successful implementation of reforms will require clear communication with all stakeholders, including government agencies and courts, impacted communities, law enforcement, and legal services, to ensure widespread awareness of any changes. Working with government and community partners, as well as local media, will be important to maximize outreach and education.

By following this guide, our hope is that Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice will begin to provide the environment for teams to develop novel, innovative, and equitable approaches to address the harm caused by unjust fines and fees.



Appendix A: Examples of Local Fine and Fee Reform

The following examples of local reforms are presented to inform and inspire other city and county officials who are working to assess and reform their fines and fees.

Fines

Parking and Traffic Tickets

Chicago, Illinois

- The Chicago City Council passed an [ordinance](#) lowering the down payment required to enter into payment plans for city tickets, decreasing penalties for the late payment of city sticker tickets, reinstating a 15-day grace period after city stickers expire (allowing more time for compliance), ending the practice of issuing same-day or consecutive-day tickets for compliance violations, and [offering an amnesty program](#) for debt resulting from city sticker tickets. (2019)

San Francisco City and County, California

- [The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and The San Francisco Financial Justice Project \(FJP\) developed a new payment plan](#) to help low-income residents pay parking tickets or other citations. Under the [low-income payment plan](#) residents earning below 200% of the federal poverty level can now pay \$5 to start a monthly payment plan, have their late fees (which can double the cost of the citation) waived, and opt to enroll in community service to pay off their citations. During the first three months after the new payment plan was established, plan enrollment increased by 400%; revenue collected also increased. (2018)
- [The San Francisco Superior Court adopted guidelines to relieve the burden of traffic fines and fees](#) on people who cannot pay them. The [guidelines allow individuals with incomes below 250% of the federal poverty level](#) (\$30,000 a year for a single person) to get their tickets discounted by 80% or more and pay off the balance through a payment plan or by performing community service. In addition, FJP and the courts worked together to revise the courts' Ability to Pay application [form](#) and streamline the process by which the court verifies eligibility for the traffic fine and fee discounts, allowing individuals to present their benefits cards (EBT and Medicaid) as proof of eligibility. Residents can apply for traffic fine and fees discounts online, in person, or by mail, and can submit an application even if the citation is past due and in collections. (2018)
- The San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) and FJP worked together to create a cloud-based income verification database to make it easier for departments and the courts to discount fines and fees for people with lower incomes.

The updated verification tool allows departments to ask individuals whether they would like to streamline their application process by looking up whether they have already been certified as eligible for certain safety net programs, relieving the applicant from the burden of submitting additional proof to qualify for the discount. (2018)

Municipal Fines

San Francisco City and County, California

- The San Francisco District Attorney's office, in collaboration with the Financial Justice Project and San Francisco Superior Court, established the [CONNECT Program](#), which allows individuals struggling with homelessness to clear their Quality of Life citations if they receive 20 hours of social services assistance. (2019)

Library Fines

- [Numerous jurisdictions](#) have eliminated library fines.

Fees

Criminal Administrative Fees

Alameda County, California

- The Alameda County Board of Supervisors passed an [ordinance](#) ending the assessment of county-imposed criminal administrative fees, including probation fees, public defender fees, and fees for participating in the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (S.W.A.P.). The ordinance also prohibited the collection of debt incurred as a result of the fees, [resulting in the waiver of \\$26 million of criminal justice debt](#). (2018)

Contra Costa County, California

- The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors passed a [resolution](#) imposing a moratorium on the assessment and collection of county-imposed adult criminal fees, including probation fees, public defender fees, and fees for alternatives to incarceration, such as electronic monitoring and work programs. (2019)

Los Angeles County, California

- The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed an [ordinance](#) eliminating "discretionary" county-imposed criminal administrative fees, including, though not limited to, fees related to [probation supervision, work furlough, misdemeanor and drug diversion programs, pretrial electronic monitoring, and public defender fees](#). The ordinance also waived related criminal fees debt. (2019)

New York City, New York

- The New York City Council passed an [ordinance](#) eliminating fees of up to 8% on bail payments paid by credit card. (2019)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- The county amended their rules of criminal procedure to eliminate a 3% fee courts retained from posted bail payments. (2018)

Ramsey County, Minnesota

- [The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners eliminated 11 fees](#), including probation supervision fees, electronic monitoring fees, and fees for diabetes supplies and over-the-counter medications for people in custody. (2020)

San Francisco City and County, California

- The San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed an [ordinance](#) eliminating all county-imposed criminal administrative fees, including, though not limited to, probation fees, electronic monitoring fees, and booking fees, and [waived \\$33 million in related debt for 21,000 people](#). (2018)

Jail Fees

Dallas County, Texas

- [The Dallas County Commissioners Court approved a 5-year contract with Securus that reduces jail phone call fees from \\$3.60 every 15 minutes to 18 cents per 15 minutes](#), eliminated fees for setting up inmate accounts, and significantly reduced third-party vendor fees. (2020)

New York City, New York

- The New York City Council passed an [ordinance](#) eliminating fees for jail phone calls. One week after the reform was implemented, [call volume at the Rikers jail complex increased by 38%](#). (2018)

Ottawa County, Michigan

- [The Ottawa County Board of Commissioner passed a resolution reducing jail fees](#) from \$60/day imposed for the duration of a person's incarceration to a one-time flat fee of \$60 regardless of duration of incarceration. (2018)

San Francisco City and County, California

- [San Francisco Mayor London Breed, Sheriff Vicki Hennessy, and The San Francisco Financial Justice Project worked together to make phone calls from jail free](#) and end all county markups or commissions on jail commissary items. (2019)

St. Louis County, Missouri

- The St. Louis County Council passed an ordinance [eliminating booking fees, bond fees, and several fees related to providing medical care for incarcerated individuals and waiving \\$3.4 million in outstanding related debt](#). (2019)

Juvenile Administrative Fees

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- The [Philadelphia Department of Human Services ended the assessment](#) of juvenile detention fees. (2017)

Los Angeles County, California

- [The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors imposed a moratorium](#) on the collection of juvenile detention fees. (2009)

Orleans Parish, Louisiana

- The Orleans Parish Juvenile Court passed a [resolution](#) eliminating discretionary juvenile administrative fees, including probation supervision fees, physical and mental examination fees, care and treatment fees, appointed counsel fees, medical treatment fees, and teen or youth court program fees under informal adjustment or deferred disposition agreements. (2018)

Shelby County, Tennessee

- The [Shelby County Juvenile Court ended the assessment](#) of juvenile daily detention fees and fees for court costs. (2019)

Sacramento, California

- The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors passed a [resolution](#) repealing fees associated with the care of juveniles detained in the Youth Detention Facility, juvenile supervision, drug testing, electronic monitoring, and representing juveniles in delinquency proceedings. The resolution also waived \$23.2 million in outstanding fee debt and prohibited the collection of juvenile fees. (2017)

Numerous California Counties

- [Many California counties](#) have stopped collecting juvenile fee debt, and several have discharged existing debt.

Towing Fees

San Francisco City and County, California

- [The San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency discounted tow fees](#) by more than half for individuals who earn below 200% of the federal poverty level (about \$50,000 for a family of four)—covering about 25% of households in San Francisco. The SFMTA lowered boot fees from \$500 to \$100 for lower-income households, and, for the first time, allowed lower-income people to pay off underlying tickets through payment plans or community service. (2018)
- More recently, [the SFMTA Board approved deeper discounts](#) on towing and booting for people struggling with homelessness. (2020)

Utility Fees

Chicago, Illinois

- [Mayor Lori Lightfoot developed the Utility Billing Relief Pilot Program](#), which addresses the negative impact of overdue water bills on low-income residents, particularly residents of color. Under the [program](#), participants will pay 50% less for water, sewer, and water-sewer tax bills. If participants successfully pay the discounted rate for one year, the city will waive previously incurred water utility debt. During the first year of program enrollment, the city will not shut off participants' water, charge late payment penalties or pursue debt collection. To be eligible for the program, a resident must be a homeowner and qualify for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Mayor Lightfoot introduced the program through her 2020 budget. The program was enacted via city council [ordinance](#). It launched in the first half of 2020. (2019)

San Francisco, California

- The [San Francisco Public Utility Commission eliminated fees](#) for people who have had their water shut off. (2018)

Child Support Reimbursement for Public Benefits

San Francisco City and County, California

- The San Francisco Department of Child Support Services and The San Francisco Financial Justice Project conducted a pilot project involving 32 parents who owed child support debt to the government to reimburse the government for providing public assistance to their child. The project leveraged philanthropic dollars and a state debt relief program to pay down child support debt, allowing 100% of the child support payments made by those parents to go to their children rather than the government. According to a [study](#) by the Urban Institute, the debt relief led to an improvement in family relationships, an increase in the credits scores and financial health of noncustodial parents, and more consistent child support payments. (2018)

Consequences of Nonpayment

Driver's License Suspensions

Chicago, Illinois

- The Chicago City Council passed an [ordinance](#) ending the suspension of driver's licenses for the nonpayment of traffic tickets and vehicle compliance tickets. (2019)

Durham, North Carolina

- The City of Durham's Innovation Team worked with the Durham District Attorney's Office and the court to waive old traffic fines and fees and helped restore 35,000 driver's licenses that had been suspended for the nonpayment of traffic tickets. (2017)

San Francisco City and County, California

- [Mayor London Breed, The San Francisco Financial Justice Project, and the San Francisco Superior Court partnered to identify and clear all outstanding holds on driver's licenses](#) for the failure to appear for a traffic court date. After working with the Superior Court to identify more than 88,000 holds that should have been cleared, FJP worked with Mayor Breed and the Superior Court to lift the DMV holds. (2019)

Washington, DC

- The District of Columbia City Council passed the [Driver's License Revocation Fairness Amendment Act of 2018](#), which eliminated the suspension of drivers' licenses for unpaid traffic debt or failure to appear at hearings. (2018)

Multiple Jurisdictions

- Prosecutors in [Shelby County, Tennessee](#); [Davidson County, Tennessee](#); [Cook County, Illinois](#); and [Suffolk County, Massachusetts](#), have stopped prosecuting charges of driving on a suspended license.

Warrants for Failure to Pay or Appear

Los Angeles, California

- [The Los Angeles County District Attorney and Los Angeles City Attorney partnered to void nearly 2 million citations and warrants](#). The City Attorney and District Attorney filed motions in the Los Angeles Superior Court to suspend fines and fees for minor pedestrian, quality-of-life, and moving violations. The City Attorney recalled and quashed nearly 150,000 warrants and moved to dismiss approximately 800,000 pending infraction citations (with 65% of those over 10 years old, and the oldest dating back to 1981). The District Attorney recalled and quashed nearly 248,000 warrants and moved to dismiss roughly 900,000 pending infraction citations (with 54% of those over 10 years old, and the oldest dating back to 1981). (2019)

Emergency Fine and Fee Reforms in Response to COVID-19

- [Fines and Fees Justice Center: COVID-19 Crisis Policy Recommendations and Policy Tracker](#)
- [San Francisco Actions to Alleviate the Burden of Government Fines, Fees, and Collections During the COVID-19 Health Crisis](#)

Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice is a joint initiative of [PolicyLink](#), [The San Francisco Financial Justice Project](#), and the [Fines and Fees Justice Center](#).

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity by Lifting Up What Works®. Over the last several years, PolicyLink has worked to [educate advocates and government leaders](#) about the harmful impact of fines and fees on low-income communities, particularly those of color. PolicyLink is a leading proponent of the Families Over Fees Act (also known as California Senate Bill 144), which is potentially groundbreaking legislation that would eliminate virtually all criminal justice administrative fees in California. PolicyLink is also a steering committee member of [Debt Free Justice California](#), a statewide coalition committed to ending criminal-legal system policies that disproportionately penalize low-income people.

The San Francisco Financial Justice Project is the nation's first effort embedded in government to assess and reform fines, fees, and financial penalties disproportionately impacting low-income residents and communities of color. Working with city and county departments, the courts, and community organizations, the Financial Justice Project has spearheaded the elimination or reduction of dozens of fines and fees and lifted millions of dollars in debt off of tens of thousands of San Francisco's residents. The project's accomplishments are listed [here](#). A guide to available fine and fee discounts for low-income residents in San Francisco is available [here](#).

The Fines and Fees Justice Center (FFJC) seeks to catalyze a movement to eliminate the fines and fees that distort justice. FFJC's goal is to eliminate fees in the justice system and to ensure that fines are equitably imposed and enforced. FFJC provides resources, makes critical connections, offers strategic advice, and serves as a hub for the fines and fees reform movement, working with impacted communities, researchers, advocates, legislators, justice system stakeholders, and media all across America. For more information on fines and fees work around the country, please see the searchable FFJC Clearinghouse [here](#).



Headquarters

1438 Webster Street
Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
t (510) 663-2333
f (510) 663-9684

Communications

75 Broad Street
Suite 701
New York, NY 10004
t (212) 629-9570

Washington, DC

1301 K Street NW
Suite 300W-414
Washington, DC 20005

www.policylink.org

Facebook: /PolicyLink

Twitter: @policylink

1 Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Place
City Hall, Room 140
San Francisco, CA 94102

<https://sfgov.org/financialjustice/>

Twitter: @FairFinesFees

New York

185 W Broadway
Suite C538
New York, NY 10013

Washington, DC

1201 Connecticut Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036

<https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/>

Facebook: FinesandFeesJC

Twitter: @FinesandFeesJC