



Imposing Instability

**How Court Fines and Fees Destabilize
Government Budgets and Criminalize Those Who Cannot Pay**

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About Us

The Fines and Fees Justice Center is a national hub for research, advocacy, and collaboration for the reform of fines and fees. Our mission is to end the practice of governments' using fines and fees to profit from vulnerable communities. We empower state and local efforts to end fees in the justice system and ensure that fines are fair and equitably imposed.

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Executive Summary

For decades, state and local jurisdictions have increasingly used people in the justice system as a way of making money and filling dwindling public coffers by imposing fines and fees in virtually every aspect of the court system. When people drawn into the criminal, juvenile, traffic, and municipal court systems are unable to pay these fines and fees, many are faced with long-term destabilizing consequences that extend beyond the individual, impacting families and communities. This report examines the imposition and collection of court-imposed fines and fees from FY2018 to FY2022 to understand its deep impacts on communities and government finances both in and out of times of crisis. Although fines and fees occur throughout the broader criminal justice system, this report focuses specifically on court-imposed fines and fees for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations.

The data from FY2018-FY2022 show that state governments exploit court-involved people as a way to generate revenue and harshly penalize them when they cannot meet budget demands. Our analysis of how collections and revenue have changed over this period demonstrates that this revenue generation method is not only unjust but also unstable. Our findings highlight that this system is placing monumental financial burdens on individuals and families across the country for an ever-declining benefit to the government, as evidenced by decreases in collections and revenue during our study period. Despite diminishing returns for the government, many states divert valuable court and law enforcement resources to pursue and enforce bench warrants – at staggering numbers – against individuals who are unable to pay their fines and fees. We conclude that using fines and fees as a revenue-generating mechanism is bad for people, bad for budgets, and requires bold reform nationwide.

Key Findings:

1. In 24 states, local and state courts imposed nearly \$14 billion in fines and fees on justice-involved people over five years.

2. On average, justice fees accounted for more than 50 percent of these court-imposed monetary sanctions, demonstrating that revenue generation through court-imposed taxation is a primary objective of many court systems.

3. Court fines and fee impositions trended up even in the face of declining caseloads. From FY2018 to FY2022, the median number of incoming cases dropped by 20 percent, yet the amount of fines and fees imposed increased by 3 percent.

4. Court fines and fees are a risky and unstable revenue source for governments. Over the five-year period, median collections of court-imposed fines and fees declined by 33 percent and did not recover after the COVID-19 crisis subsided.

5. Between FY2018 and FY2022, just 13 states issued over 2.5 million bench warrants, subjecting each of those individuals to arrest and incarceration for failing to pay court debt or appear in court. Most governments continue to rely heavily on harsh penalties for nonpayment of fines and fees in an attempt to squeeze as many dollars as possible from already-vulnerable communities.

6. Governments and courts do a poor job gathering and reporting data on fine and fee imposition and collection across the country.

Transparent data are spotty or unavailable in more than half of the states. This limits policymakers' ability to understand, let alone rectify, the damaging impacts of their dependence on fines and fees to fill government coffers.

Recommendations:

Based on our analysis of court-imposed fines and fees, collections, and revenue, we recommend that states and local governments implement key reforms to address the systemic inequities, inefficiencies, and harmful impacts of fines and fees, ensuring a more equitable and sustainable approach to funding and justice.

Eliminate all justice system fees.

More than half of the debt imposed on people comes from fees that act as a hidden tax imposed only on people in the court system—often without consideration of their ability to pay. Eliminating all court-imposed fees is crucial for reducing financial burdens on individuals, addressing systemic inequities, and ensuring a more just and equitable legal system.

End government dependence on court-imposed fine and fee revenue streams by replacing them with more stable and sustainable funding sources.

The data show that court-imposed fines and fees are a declining revenue source that presents a risk to government funding while imposing an extreme burden on individuals and families. These revenue streams should be replaced with more stable and fair funding mechanisms to eliminate their harmful impact on marginalized communities.

Bench warrants should only be used to address threats to public safety and never as a tool to collect debt.

Whether for failure to pay or for failure to appear at a hearing on court debt, the result of a bench warrant is that a person is arrested and jailed without any assessment of their current ability to pay that debt. Debt is not a public safety issue.

Discharge old court-imposed fines and fees debt.

Discharging older court debt provides financial relief for individuals, reduces administrative costs, promotes social and economic stability, contributes to thriving communities, and decreases further involvement with the criminal legal system. The data show that many governments already operate without an expectation of collecting on this debt, so eliminating it is unlikely to have any great fiscal impact on the state general budget.

Mandate better data collection and transparency practices for court-imposed fines and fees.

Transparent and detailed reporting of fines and fees data is essential for evaluating their impact, addressing systemic inequities, and implementing evidence-based reforms to reduce harm and increase fairness in the criminal legal system. Fewer than half the states provide any publicly accessible data on the imposition, collection, and enforcement of fines and fees. Many of those that did provide data only provided partial data. If state and local governments are incapable of understanding how fine and fee imposition and collection operate in reality, our fiscal and justice policy decisions are operating blindly.

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Glossary of Terms

Collections

The total amount of money collected from a funding source (i.e. total fines and fees dollars collected in a fiscal year.) When collections are forecasted for the coming year, those estimates are called **projections**. When final collections are totaled at the end of the year, these totals are called **actuals**.

Fees

Costs, assessments, and/or surcharges imposed to access court-related services or to fund the justice system or other government services.

Fines

Financial penalties imposed as punishment for violating the law.

Fiscal Office

A generic term we use in this report to refer to the government entity responsible for managing a state's financial operations, i.e. budgeting, revenue collection, expenditure oversight, and financial reporting. This may be a Governor's budget office, a Comptroller's office, or other statewide budgetary office.

General Fund

The primary discretionary fund (similar to a bank account) for financing a jurisdiction's operations. General funds typically receive much of their revenue from broad-based taxes, such as income tax and sales tax, but may also receive revenue from other sources like fines and fees. Lawmakers decide how to divide up money from the general fund to pay for government expenses, services, and programming in each year's budget.

Judicial Office

A generic term we use in this report to refer to the entity within any state's judicial branch that is responsible for managing court operations, or supporting the functioning of the court system

Revenue

The total amount of income generated by collections from a funding source. This money is then used by governments for public spending.

History of Fines and Fees as an Inequitable Revenue Generator

Although all court-imposed fines and fees have a punitive effect on those ordered to pay them, fines and fees serve very different purposes in theory. Fines are meant to be monetary punishments for doing something that is against the law, while fees are explicitly meant to generate revenue to pay for the justice system or for other government programs. Anytime the court system is tasked with making money, the funds—regardless of what the funds are going towards—often come at the expense of those who can least afford them.

States and local jurisdictions have long relied on court-imposed fines and fees to build new revenue streams and fund public operations that serve all residents, both related and unrelated to running justice systems. This is especially true during periods of tightening fiscal conditions. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, when the majority of states passed laws curbing taxes and federal funding shifts created new constraints on state and local revenues, jurisdictions began increasingly imposing court debt through the expansion of fines and fees.¹ In the 1990s, the same pattern continued: 44 states enacted tax cuts that resulted in an overall 7.6 percent decline in state taxes, at a time when the U.S. system of mass incarceration was ballooning, creating substantial new costs. To compensate for this gap, governments again widely increased the value and number of fines and fees – at great cost to the people they were imposed upon.² Yet again, during the 2007-2009 “Great Recession,” when state revenue sharply decreased, 47 states increased both civil and criminal fines and fees, presumably at least in part as a way to make up revenue holes and balance budgets.³

This pattern suggests that governments have consistently attempted to rely on fines and fees as a revenue stream to bolster public funding in lieu of taking responsible and transparent budget-stabilizing measures, such as adjusting tax policy or identifying new areas for savings. Even outside of national economic downturn cycles, governments too often use fines and fees to respond to localized fiscal stress, as seen in a 2017 survey of local governments in New York.⁴ In this survey, 62


percent of cities indicated that they responded to fiscal stress by raising fees. This is just one example of how governments have relied on a system of court-imposed fines and fees as a backdoor method of avoiding fiscal conversations with taxpayers. These systems have grown too large and become costly for individuals – particularly those with the least resources – especially when governments attempt to enforce collections on those who cannot afford to pay. This intentional extraction of dollars from individuals and families involved in the criminal legal system comes at almost every touch point of that system, placing outsized burdens on a very concentrated population to maintain systems that are meant to serve everyone. Even though fines and fees are imposed for different purposes, both have essentially become a money-making revenue scheme that shifts responsibility for funding government operations away from the general public to a distinct population that is largely poorer, disproportionately nonwhite, and with less political influence. This has created a perverse incentive for governments to treat the criminal legal system like a piggy bank, maximizing people’s interactions with and payments to the criminal legal system, rather than a true tool for justice and public safety.⁵

By disproportionately burdening lower-income communities and communities of color,⁶ this revenue scheme further ingrains inequities and entrenches people in poverty. When faced with a mountain of fines and fees debt, the people who owe it are often forced to cut back on necessities like food, healthcare, or rent.⁷ Those who cannot pay can be subject to harsh consequences like loss of driver’s licenses or even incarceration.⁸

Using law enforcement, courts, and other justice system resources to fill government coffers also creates significant credibility issues for the justice system and can increase friction between the government and those whom the system is supposed to be protecting. A stark example of this came to light over a decade ago in Ferguson, Missouri, with the killing of Michael Brown at the hands of police officer Darren Wilson. The officer involved was never convicted of any wrongdoing

in the shooting, but the incident and the public outcry—both locally and nationally—led to a federal investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). On March 4, 2015, the DOJ released a scathing review of the many discriminatory and ineffective policing systems that contributed to the killing. The DOJ highlighted the egregious overuse of fines and fees to fund police budgets in Ferguson, which incentivized police to focus their role on generating revenue rather than ensuring public safety.⁹ Police were consistently ordered to gear their assignments and patrols toward maximizing the number of tickets they could write, which created a culture where police saw residents “less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue.”¹⁰ The investigation brought a new awareness of how revenue-focused policing creates a deep-seated distrust in the police, as well as the courts that enabled them, delegitimizing both as agents of public safety and eroding trust in government. Communities across the country quickly recognized that this was not a problem unique to Ferguson, given the number of jurisdictions that rely heavily on fines and fees to balance their budgets (in some cases, over half of their general revenues).¹¹

In the following years, researchers, scholars, and practitioners examined and reported on the breadth and extent of how fines and fees are imposed on people through the criminal legal system, exposing the blunt reality that this is a bad revenue source from both an equity and an efficiency lens.



This has created a perverse incentive for governments to treat the criminal legal system like a piggy bank, maximizing people's interactions with and payments to the criminal legal system, rather than a true tool for justice and public safety.

For example, an analysis by the Sycamore Institute found that for the four years prior to FY 2021, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation had a nearly \$4 million budget deficit each year due to uncollected fees.¹² The Brennan Center conducted research on counties in Texas and New Mexico and found that for every dollar of fine and fee debt eventually

collected across the 10 jurisdictions studied, more than 40 percent (\$0.41) went to pay for the collections and enforcement itself, excluding law enforcement expenses and the costs of other external agencies used. In 2019, the Fines and Fees Justice Center (FFJC) sought data from court systems in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to better understand just how much unpaid court fines and fee debt existed as a result of governments' overreliance on fines and fees. The resulting report, [*Tip of the Iceberg: How Much Criminal Justice Debt Does the U.S. Really Have?*](#) documented at least \$27.6 billion in unpaid fines and fees across the nation.¹³ However, this amount was a gross understatement of the total court debt people are living with because half the states were unwilling or unable to provide information about the amount of outstanding court debt in their state. This means that the true value of unpaid fines and fees necessarily exceeded the \$27.6 billion FFJC was able to document.

In the years since, the data story has not significantly improved. The lack of transparency, capacity, and coordination of data on court-imposed fines and fees obscures not only the extent of the burden on communities but also the extent of government dependency on these revenue streams to fund themselves. It has created a shadow debt system that operates outside the confines of traditional consumer debt protections, rules, and regulation.¹⁴ A decade later, the tragedy of Ferguson has simply been replaced by new examples of horrific and systemic abuse of fines and fees that continue to place entire communities in fear of so-called public safety systems, such as those in Brookside, Alabama¹⁵ and Lexington, Mississippi.¹⁶ When the extent of the use – or misuse – of fines and fees remains unknown, it is difficult to know how best to fix the problem. Even in communities that do not make national headlines for their abuses, overreliance on fines and fees can and does result in severe consequences for people who simply do not have the financial means to pay.

Ten years after the DOJ's findings in Ferguson, FFJC has investigated the current state of court-imposed fines and fees. This report aims to add to the national picture of how court-involved people

are currently targeted as a source of revenue, how valuable or unstable that revenue stream actually is for governments, and whether data transparency and data-driven decision-making have improved.

Scope of this Report

This report investigates the extent of fines and fees imposed by state and local courts nationwide and the revenue they generate. Notably, we focus on court-imposed fines and fees for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations. We exclude other types of monetary sanctions such as direct victim restitution, court-ordered child support, forfeitures, and other non-traffic civil fines and fees from our analysis to the extent possible, where available data allows for such separation. Although fees are imposed at every touch point of the criminal legal system, this report does not include the vast amounts of fees imposed by law enforcement, prosecutors, sheriffs, departments of correction, parole and probation offices, or by private actors providing “services” to anyone in the system. This investigation also aims to quantify the impact of court debt by examining the use of bench warrants issued for failure to appear at court hearings and for failure to pay court-imposed fines and fees. This is the first report we know of that attempts to measure the amount of criminal, juvenile, municipal, and traffic fines and fees imposed by courts on a national level and compares the burden placed on individuals and communities against the actual revenue collected for government coffers.

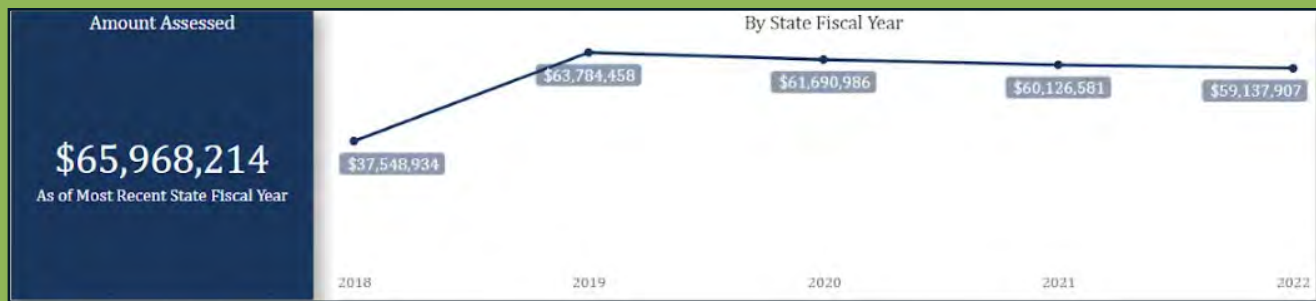
Tip of the Iceberg provided valuable yet troubling insight into the financial burden of court debt. In this report, we expand on that understanding by examining how this burden is created — focusing on the annual amount of fines and fees imposed, collected, enforced, and used by governments as a revenue source. Our analysis captures conditions before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic peak period. FY2018 and FY2019 serve as a baseline for our data, representing “pre-pandemic” times, FY2020 and FY2021 represent peak COVID impact years, and FY2022 represents a recovery year for courts and budgets when court



operations largely returned to normal¹⁷ and fiscal conditions significantly improved nationwide.¹⁸ Our categorization of fiscal years as they relate to COVID-19 allows us to draw some insights into how fines and fees impact communities and government finances, in and out of times of crisis.

This report analyzes a wealth of data about court fine and fee impositions, collections, revenue flow, and related bench warrants issued between FY2018 and FY2022. In order to collect this data, we submitted public record requests to state judicial offices and state fiscal offices in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and researched public government materials available online. Ultimately, we used judicial data from 25 states and fiscal revenue data from 21 states to conduct our analysis. This data was shared through various mediums, including direct government responses to our public record requests, existing public financial reports, and in some cases, online public dashboards and reports. A detailed reporting of data collection methods and state responses can be found in the appendix of this report.

Public Dashboards: A Model for Fines and Fees Data



Idaho Court Financial Dashboard Assessed & Collected Tab

Judicial offices were also categorized as providing data if they made fines and fees data publicly available through online reports or dashboards. Three states—[Idaho](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [New Jersey](#)— stood out for their publicly available and transparent fines and fees information through web-based dashboards. These three dashboards were a wealth of information and are examples of the kinds of fine and fee data keeping needed for transparent and effective public policy.

The State of Idaho Courts' [public financial data dashboard](#) has detailed information on statutory fees, fines, and the operation of Idaho's state courts. This dashboard offers data on court-imposed fines and fees, as well as collections, broken down by fiscal year, by district, monetary sanction, case category, and case type. The dashboard also includes data on the amount of fines and fees judges waived or suspended, as well as court-approved payment plans. In a continued effort toward transparency, the dashboard also provides a detailed breakdown of how incoming fines and fees are redistributed to local and state governments, as mandated by various statutes passed by the Idaho Legislature.

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts maintains a [dashboard](#) with data on the money collected for fines, fees, costs, and restitution. It includes the total court-ordered payments, payments made and owed by disposition year, case type, county, and courts. An [additional dashboard](#) shows the annual disbursement of court collections to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, county government, municipalities, and private restitution recipients.

The New Jersey Office of Justice Data, housed within the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) maintains a [criminal justice dashboard](#) that includes data on court fines and fees supplied by the Administrative Office of the Court (AOC). Although the dashboard provides a rich repository of information spanning from 2017 to the most recent quarter of the year, the data was not disaggregated. To enhance our analysis with year-by-year data and details by monetary sanction type, FFJC made a request to the New Jersey OAG for disaggregated information.



Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania's Dashboard of Collection Rate of Payments Ordered by Common Pleas Courts

Billions Imposed in Court Fines and Fees Across 24 States

In just 24 states, courts imposed over \$13.94 billion in fines and fees between FY2018 and FY2022. This amount differs from what courts actually collect, as many fines and fees go unpaid, often because people lack an ability to pay. This figure is also undoubtedly an undercount, as 26 states and the District of Columbia were unwilling or unable to provide court-imposed fines and fees data—including states with the largest criminal caseloads in the country, such as Texas and California.¹⁹

Even among the 24 states that provided data on fine and fee impositions, most were only able to provide partial responses to our inquiries. For instance, while twelve states²⁰ reported the amount of fines and fees including traffic offenses, only eight²¹ of those states disaggregated the data by traffic and non-traffic type; the others lumped

traffic in with all criminal data. In these eight states alone, traffic-related fines and fees totaled over \$3 billion, accounting for 40 percent of all fines and fees imposed in those states. Traffic court is one of the most common ways individuals interact with the legal system, yet we received no traffic fine and fee data from 38 states and the District of Columbia. Additionally, only twelve states provided a full appraisal of the amount of fines and fees imposed by state and local courts for traffic offenses, municipal violations, misdemeanors, and felony offenses.²² This gross undercount highlights a troubling reality: many courts fail to track the amount of fines and fees they impose, despite the fact that the criminal and civil penalties for nonpayment can be severe and long-lasting. For those that provided even partial data, Table 1 displays the amount of fines and fees imposed by fiscal year and state.



Table 1: Amount of Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Imposed By State

State	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	Total	Trend line
Alaska	\$25 M	\$26 M	\$26 M	\$21 M	\$25 M	\$123 M	
Arkansas	\$56 M	\$66 M	\$54 M	\$55 M	\$53 M	\$284 M	
Colorado ⁺	\$122 M	\$123 M	\$102 M	\$80 M	\$85 M	\$512 M	
Florida ⁺	\$839 M	\$880 M	\$607 M	\$709 M	\$729 M	\$4 B	
Idaho ⁺	\$38 M	\$64 M	\$62 M	\$60 M	\$59 M	\$283 M	
Iowa	\$252 M	\$243 M	\$203 M	\$252 M	\$209 M	\$1.2 B	
Kansas	\$63 M	\$62 M	\$49 M	\$42 M	\$51 M	\$267 M	
Maine	\$26 M	\$24 M	\$16 M	\$15 M	\$16 M	\$97 M	
Maryland	\$83 M	\$81 M	\$68 M	\$60 M	\$60 M	\$352 M	
Michigan ⁺	\$54 M	\$49 M	\$27 M	\$38 M	\$36 M	\$208 M	
Missouri	\$155 M	\$155 M	\$134 M	\$125 M	\$161 M	\$730 M	
New Jersey ^{**}	\$30 M	\$34 M	\$18 M	\$14 M	\$18 M	\$114 M	
New York ^{**}	-	-	\$14 M	\$18 M	\$22 M	\$58 M	-
N. Dakota ⁺	\$23 M	\$20 M	\$22 M	\$201 M	\$21 M	\$107 M	
Oregon ⁺	\$161 M	\$157 M	\$126 M	\$109 M	\$125 M	\$683 M	
Pennsylvania	\$536 M	\$527 M	\$369 M	\$430 M	\$430 M	\$2.3 B	
Rhode Island	\$12 M	\$12 M	\$9 M	\$10 M	\$12 M	\$55 M	
S. Carolina ⁺	\$118 M	\$118 M	\$94 M	\$92 M	\$115 M	\$537 M	
S. Dakota	\$27 M	\$26 M	\$23 M	\$25 M	\$24 M	\$125 M	
Utah	\$60 M	\$60 M	\$50 M	\$71 M	\$302 M	\$543 M	
Vermont ⁺	-	-	-	\$5 M	\$5 M	\$10 M	-
Virginia	\$380 M	\$399 M	\$325 M	\$196 M	\$192 M	\$1.5 B	
West Virginia ⁺	\$20 M	\$17 M	\$17 M	\$16 M	\$17 M	\$87 M	
Wyoming ⁺	-	\$14 M	\$14 M	\$14 M	\$13 M	\$55 M	-
Total	\$3.1 B	\$3.2 B	\$2.4 B	\$2.5 B	\$2.8 B	\$14 B	

⁺ States that provided partial data.

^{*} New Jersey and New York reported their court-imposed fines and fees data by calendar year.

A dash (-) indicates that the state did not provide data for that fiscal year.

The totals in the table are rounded to the nearest million for ease of use.

The more precise total for the amount of fines and fees imposed between FY2018 and FY2022 is \$13.94 billion.

Criminal Fines and Fees Create Outsized Burdens on Individuals and Families

The total amount of fine and fee debt imposed, as shown in Table 1, reveals the enormous financial burden people facing criminal charges shoulder. We found that over 100 million (100,457,093) cases were brought before trial courts between 2018 and 2022 in the 24 states for which we have fine and fee imposition data.²³ The caseloads include traffic violations, parking violations, ordinance violations, juvenile delinquency offenses, and criminal offenses—the same universe of court cases for which we requested fines and fees imposition data.

To determine the median amount imposed per individual, we analyzed the seven states for which we had criminal offense fine and fee data broken down by offense type and which could be directly compared to that state’s individualized criminal offense caseload data.²⁴ This allowed us to calculate a more precise per-person financial burden. In those seven states,²⁵ the findings were stark: the median amount imposed per individual across those seven states was \$2,984.²⁶ To put this in context, a person making \$15 per hour would have to work nearly 200 hours to earn this amount of money (assuming they put 100 percent of their income towards paying it off.) Or, to put it another way, this median amount imposed in fines and fees is \$241 more than the average person received for the 2023 federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),²⁷ which means someone relying on this tax intervention to fight poverty could find it all wiped out, and then some, by their fines and fees burden.

These findings are in line with research by the Tax Policy Center (TPC) that found adults with criminal court or incarceration-related fines face higher charges, greater financial strain, and a higher likelihood of adverse consequences for nonpayment, such as additional fines, driver’s license suspension, and serving jail time.²⁸ In that TPC study, 35 percent of respondents reported being charged \$1,000 or more in fines and fees in 2023. Black and Latine adults reported being charged or owing money for fines and fees at disproportionately higher rates (20 percent and 22 percent, respectively) compared to white adults (15 percent). Coupled with the outsized

financial burden FFJC has calculated from the fine and fee data provided by states, it becomes clear how criminal fines and fees specifically amplify economic inequities and exacerbate racial inequities.

Across the seven states that had sufficient data, the median amount of criminal fines and fees imposed was \$2,984 per case.

Regardless of race, the burden of criminal fines and fees is an economic albatross for many Americans. Given that nearly four out of ten people in the U.S. cannot afford an unexpected \$400 expense,²⁹ it is likely that most justice-involved individuals will struggle to pay the nearly \$3,000 median fine and fee debt seen across the states studied. Research shows that 80 to 90 percent of individuals who come before a judge are indigent,³⁰ and a third of justice-involved individuals earn less than \$10,000 per year.³¹ Objectively, as a group, people facing sanctions in the criminal system are less likely to be able to meet the higher fines and fees burden placed on them. As studies have borne out, higher criminal court debt translates into longer involvement with the legal system and harsher sanctions, including additional fines and fees people will struggle to pay off.³²

Governments also risk accumulating uncollectible debt by imposing a significant financial burden on a population that simply cannot afford to pay, creating a “lose-lose” outcome. For instance, published standards for clerks in Florida expect that a “successful” clerk will collect only 9 percent of the fines and costs imposed on felony cases.³³ Furthermore, 92.3 percent of Florida clerks reported that most criminal defendants are indigent and lack the ability to pay,³⁴ illustrating the uselessness of relying on fines and fees from this population as a revenue source.

To be clear, the burdens of fines and fees in non-criminal matters – such as traffic, municipal, and juvenile cases – are significant and deserve

attention as well.³⁵ For many individuals, even relatively smaller fines in these cases can create financial hardship, especially for those living paycheck to paycheck. Traffic fines and fees, for instance, often trigger cascading penalties for nonpayment, such as additional fees, license suspensions, or even arrests, disproportionately affecting low-income individuals and communities of color. Similarly, juvenile fines and fees can place undue strain on families, forcing parents to choose between meeting basic needs and satisfying court-imposed financial obligations.³⁶ Municipal fines and fees, frequently associated with ordinance violations, can also escalate into severe consequences for nonpayment, disproportionately targeting vulnerable populations. These burdens may differ in scale from criminal fines and fees, but their impact on individuals and families can be equally destabilizing, perpetuating cycles of poverty and injustice.



The Extremely High Rate of Fee Impositions Highlights Government's Focus on Profit Over Accountability

The sheer scale of fines and fees imposed by the justice system reveals its true priorities. These priorities become even more clear when we identify what portion of the financial obligations were related to fines (i.e., punishment for an offense) versus fees (taxation that's sole purpose is to fill government coffers). Only nine states—Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Utah—were willing or able to aggregate their data to differentiate between fines and fees.³⁷ FFJC compared the imposition of fines to the imposition of fees in these states and found that the five-year median percentage of fees imposed across these states constitutes more than half of the total court-imposed monetary sanctions. This finding shines a spotlight on the extent to which monetary sanctions are explicitly used as a revenue generator rather than an actual attempt to hold individuals accountable or change behavior. If accountability and safety were the primary motivating factors of our criminal legal systems, we would expect that the primary financial sanction would be fines, which are designed to address these issues. Instead, we see that over half of all costs imposed were for the explicit purpose of making money for the government.

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Table 2: Fees as a Share of Total Court Fines and Fees Imposed

Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Utah, FY2018-FY2022

Fiscal Year	Median Percentage
FY2018 "Pre-COVID"	51.47%
FY2019 "Pre-COVID"	53.27%
FY2020 "Peak COVID"	51.08%
FY2021 "Peak COVID"	49.03%
FY2022 "Recovery"	62.51%
All 5 years	51.47%

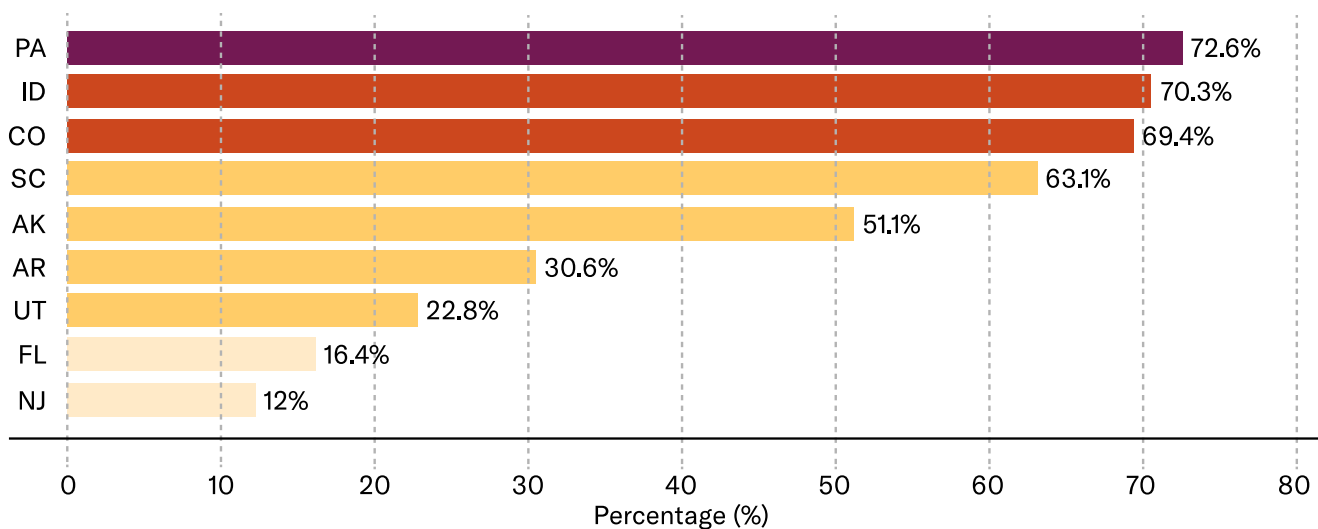
When examined across a five-year span, this reliance on fees intended to generate revenue shows a significant relationship to the needs of government financing, rather than accountability or public safety. As Table 2 shows, from FY2018 to FY2022, fees made up the majority of costs imposed in these nine states. Notably, however, the portion of fees imposed increased significantly in FY 2022, as state and local governments recovered from the COVID-19 crisis. This 13.5 percentage point increase in fee impositions that year was driven in large part by data from one state, Utah, which imposed over \$218 million more in fees in FY2022 than the previous year. Even if we exclude Utah's fee data, the court-imposed fees accounted for a median of 55 percent of total impositions in FY2022 among the other eight states, still marking a notably higher fee rate than any of the previous four years.

Utah's spike in fees provides a devastating example of how just one fee can make a significant impact. Utah's increase was driven largely by a surge in a single fee known as a Plea in Abeyance fees for traffic citations.³⁸ Utah's imposition of fees increased an extraordinary 1,699 percent in FY 2022, while fine impositions increased by 22.6 percent that same year. On its own, such an alarmingly large fine increase over one year is troubling enough, but it pales in comparison to the more than \$200 million overall fee problem in the state. The silver lining, if there is one, is that Utah has the data that illustrates what is happening, which provides decision-makers with the information needed to understand the problem, should they choose to make changes. These findings are alarming and are a clear example of states using fees as a revenue tool. Without

more nationwide data transparency, we are left to wonder how many other states are using revenue-generating fees in the same way.

The prevalence of revenue-generating fees should raise significant alarm. Between FY2018 and FY2022, nine jurisdictions imposed over **\$3.6 billion in fees alone**, amounts that suggest courts treat the individuals before them less like members of the community and more like an additional "tax base" for state and local governments. This high rate of fee imposition is a point of concern and highlights a systemic imbalance that demands deeper scrutiny.

Nine jurisdictions imposed over \$3.6 billion in fees alone, amounts that suggest courts treat the individuals before them less like members of the community and more like an additional "tax base" for state and local governments.

Graph 1: (Median) 5-year Percentage of Court-Imposed Monetary Sanctions That are Fees

The ratio between fines and fees imposed in each of these states in Graph 1, is alarming. When fine and fee impositions are relatively even, it becomes clear that revenue generation has become a primary goal of courts. And when there is a significant imbalance in favor of fees, it suggests that there is an intentional decision to prioritize profit over promoting justice. Even where fees make up a small portion of the overall impositions, the fact that fees are purely revenue generating raises real concerns about the goals of these courts. As long as revenue-generating fees exist in the criminal legal system, questions surrounding equity, conflicts of interest, and perverse incentives for government entities dependent on the revenue will remain.

This overwhelming reliance on fees reveals a troubling disconnect from the core purpose of justice. Research indicates that monetary sanctions – whether fines or fees – are a poor deterrent against crime.³⁹ Therefore, prioritizing revenue generation over accountability only deepens this disconnect, undermining the justice system’s legitimacy. This is why courts and legislatures should not be tempted to simply replace fees with higher fines in an attempt to preserve revenue. If the goal is making money, the legitimacy of the system remains in question.

Apart from the findings from our limited sample, other research suggests that imposing more fees than fines does not appear to be unique. For example, one 2023 study examined budget data from three U.S. counties and found that “fines and fees that extract revenue from a justice-involved population are more common than those with [compliance] objectives.”⁴⁰ This reflects a troubling pattern of systemic reliance on fees as a substitute for taxes, shifting financial responsibility onto court-involved individuals instead of distributing it more fairly through traditional revenue sources.

Due to incomplete and non-transparent data collection and reporting practices plaguing so many of the nation’s court systems, we could not analyze the difference between the imposition of fines and fees in every state. The lack of data means that much of the country operates completely blind regarding the amount of fines and fees state and municipal court systems impose on individuals, and most have little or no understanding of to what extent fees are used as a tax substitute for filling government coffers.

Fines and Fees Impositions Persist Despite Declines in Caseloads, Suggesting an Undermining of Public Safety Goals

The magnitude of court fines and fees ordered by courts only tell part of our story. To deepen our understanding, we looked at the evolution of fine and fee impositions, collections, and revenue from FY2018 to FY2022, a span of years before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic peak. These trend analyses give us new insights into how courts consistently exploit people to generate revenue, and how that revenue creates a poor funding source for governments, both in and out of times of national crisis.

Court-imposed fines and fees are closely tied to the volume and nature of court caseloads and, as such, should reflect similar trends over time. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, incoming criminal and traffic caseloads were on the decline. According to the Court Statistics Project (CSP), there was an 18 percent decrease in all criminal caseload types from 2012 to 2023 and a 41 percent decline in traffic cases.⁴³ In order to understand how this decline in caseloads impacted court-imposed fines and fees, we compared caseload data from CSP with imposition data provided by court judicial offices.

Using incoming caseload amounts from CSP for criminal, traffic, and delinquency offenses, we found the median state caseload decreased by 20.3 percent from FY2018 to FY2022 across the 18 states for which we have all five years of court financial imposition data and caseload data.⁴⁴ However, during this same period, the median amount of fines and fees imposed by these same 18 states actually increased by 2.8 percent. This stark disparity demonstrates that fewer incoming cases did not result in proportionally fewer monetary sanctions over the five-year period. In other words, despite declining caseloads, courts continued to impose higher amounts of fines and fees. This pattern suggests that some jurisdictions

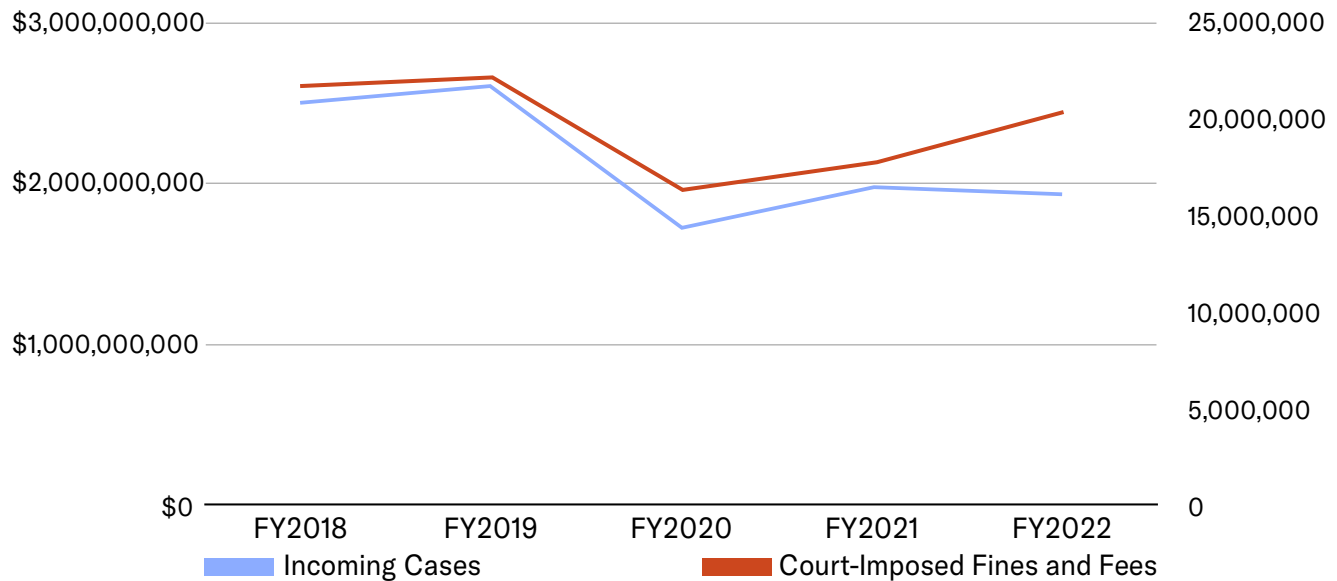
A Note on Fiscal Years & the COVID-19 Timeline

Our report groups imposition and collection data for court fines and fees by fiscal year (FY). For most states, this year runs from July 1- June 30. The COVID-19 pandemic began impacting individuals, government budgets, and court operations⁴¹ in March 2020, which falls in the last four months of FY2020. The fiscal fallout for many revenue sources continued until nationwide economic conditions generally began to recover in early 2021, or halfway through FY2021, and into FY2022.⁴² In the five years covered by this report, we consider FY2018 and FY2019 to be pre-pandemic years, FY2020 and FY2021 to be the peak COVID fiscal crisis years, and FY2022 to be a fiscal recovery year.

The only states with data in this report that do not have July - June fiscal years are Texas (with a September - August FY) and Alabama (with an October - September FY.) We did not receive any court imposition or collections data for Alabama, but we successfully received data for Texas collections, and incorporated data from both states' general fund revenue forecasts in our analysis of fines and fees revenue deposited into the general fund. We do not believe this FY difference significantly skews any of our overall findings. Still, it is unsurprising that both states show a far more significant decrease in fines and fees revenue to the general fund in their FY2020 than in FY2021, as more of the COVID fiscal crisis would have occurred in their FY2020 year.

may be increasing fines and fees per case to offset declining caseloads and maintain revenue, rather than in pursuit of any real public safety goal.

This trend becomes visually clear not just when analyzing median trends but also when looking at total fines and fees and total caseload changes over the 5-years, as seen in Graph 2.

Graph 2: Comparison of Court-Imposed Fines & Fees and Caseloads

Changes from FY2018-FY2019 represent “pre-COVID” times, while changes in FY2020 and FY2021 represent peak COVID impact years, and changes in FY2022 represent the peak “recovery” year. Though imposition data was received for 24 states, this analysis includes 18 states with five full years of impositions and caseload data. States with incomplete data were excluded to ensure accuracy in comparisons.

Data from FY2018 and FY2019, which serve as baselines for “normal years,” show that court-imposed fines and fees were increasing slightly alongside incoming caseloads before the pandemic. However, by FY2020, which coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, both impositions and caseloads had declined. As the government and commercial institutions attempted to return to normalcy by the end of FY2021, both impositions and caseloads began to rise again, continuing their expected parallel pattern, albeit with a greater gap between fine and fee impositions and caseloads, signaling that impositions were outpacing caseloads.

Court-involved individuals continued to be viewed as a potential source of revenue that courts needed to extract more from in order to maintain the same hoped-for income levels.

From FY2021 (when COVID shutdowns generally ended) to FY2022 (the peak recovery year), the historical pattern splintered. While caseloads dropped by over 200,000, the amount of fines and fees imposed that year increased by nearly \$300M.

By FY2022, court-imposed fines and fees were en route to rebound to near pre-COVID levels. In contrast, incoming caseloads remained significantly reduced, down a fifth compared to FY2018.

This notable shift and decoupling of court-imposed fines and fees from caseload trends in the post-COVID landscape is alarming, particularly because research has shown that prioritizing the generation and collection of legal financial obligations can actively undermine public safety. A 2018 study found that diverting law enforcement resources toward revenue collection compromises critical police functions, such as solving crime. Specifically, “a 1% increase in the share of own-source revenues from fees, fines, and forfeitures is associated with a statistically and substantively significant 6.1 percentage point decrease in the violent crime clearance rate and 8.3 percentage point decrease in the property crime clearance rate.”⁴⁵ In essence, an increased reliance on fines and fees turns police and courts into debt collectors. This not only perpetuates financial harm, but also diminishes the legitimacy of criminal justice institutions, further straining public trust and safety.

The pandemic exposed the rigidity of the fines and fees system, where revenue generation appeared to remain a priority despite the significant reduction in caseloads. The smaller decline in court-imposed fines and fees compared to caseloads suggests that court-involved individuals continued to be viewed as a potential source of revenue that courts needed to extract more from in order to maintain the same hoped-for income levels.



Declining Revenue Highlights an Unstable Funding Source for Governments

In addition to analyzing the impact of court fines and fees on those who owe them, we wanted to better understand how using these fines and fees as a revenue generator impacts state and local governments. Our findings reveal that fines and fees not only place an immense burden on court-involved people, but also make for a fiscally irresponsible system for funding government agencies and operations.

State and local budgets must generally be balanced, meaning every dollar of projected revenue is essential to fund each line item of spending. This limits governments' abilities to tolerate revenue volatility because running the government (and paying the bills) depends largely on each projected revenue source coming in as forecasted. Therefore, by using fines and fees from justice-involved people as a revenue source, the government makes itself dependent on people committing crimes, racking up bills, and cycling through the system. This reliance creates a system that literally banks on the crime it claims it is trying to deter. And since budgeting is an incremental process where one year's revenue plan usually remains the foundation for the next year's budget, this practice easily becomes an entrenched system of financial extraction from court-involved people. Moreover, because fines and fees disproportionately affect individuals from low-income communities and communities of color – precisely the people who are least likely to be able to pay fines and fees – this compounds the volatility. One can reasonably expect that when people cannot pay the debt, the revenue isn't actualized, putting the government's ability to pay its bills at risk.

Collections Have Declined Over Time, Creating Risks for Governments

To investigate the financial value and stability of this revenue system for governments, FFJC requested annual fines and fees collections data from all state judicial offices between FY2018 and FY2022, as well as annual revenue data from state fiscal offices showing how much court-imposed fines and fees are deposited to general funds to support general state operations. We only identified usable collections data for 19 states, and usable General Fund revenue data for 21 states, raising significant concerns about government tracking and reporting systems for fines and fees, and broader government transparency.

The data we obtained, however, gave us valuable insights into the very real risks of relying on court fines and fees as a revenue stream. We found that **annual fines and fees collections were declining before the COVID pandemic, sharply decreased during the COVID fiscal crisis, and did not “bounce back” even as general fiscal conditions strengthened in FY2022.**⁴⁶

Collection Totals Vs. Collection Rates

While the annual collection data we received from judicial offices was valuable to understanding how fines and fees collections changed over the 5-year period (FY2018-FY2022), the collections totals cannot directly be translated into collection *rates*, or amount of fines and fees collected out of the amount imposed. This is because governments reported both fines and fees impositions and collections on an annual basis, and no court offices gave us data disaggregating collections by fines and fees that were imposed in the same year versus fines and fees imposed in a prior year. As a result, we cannot assume that the amount collected is directly comparable to the annual amount imposed for that year and, therefore, do not draw conclusions about collection *rates* in this report. However, by looking at how collections totals changed over the 5-year period we examined, we gained valuable insight into the instability of fines and fees as a government revenue source. For this reason, this section explores the annual percentage change of fines and fee collections as a primary metric of the value of court-imposed fines and fees to governments.

Though it is not explored in this report, it is worth noting that many other studies show that collections rates for court-imposed fines and fees tend to be low, largely because they are imposed disproportionately on people who are already low-income and simply do not have the resources to pay off their court debt. For example:

- Recent research in Jefferson County, Alabama, found that most people with outstanding legal financial obligations did not pay anything towards their balances over the five-year period studied, which was of little surprise given that 71 percent of those in the sample were already found to be indigent.⁴⁷
- Virginia’s Legal Aid Justice Center also found that between FY2019 and FY2023, just 3 percent of court-imposed public defender fees were collected in the same year they were assessed.⁴⁸
- The ACLU of Pennsylvania found that over 90 percent of people with public defenders still owed fines and costs a decade after their cases were resolved.⁴⁹

These low rates underscore the unreliability and inefficiency of fines and fees revenue systems.

Whether the decline in collections is due primarily to declining caseloads, inability to pay, changes in enforcement, or a combination of these factors, the fact is that **a declining revenue stream makes for a poor revenue stream** upon which to fund state and local expenses. We have seen this to be true for fines and fees revenue streams at multiple levels of government, including the following examples:

- In recent years, the federal Victims of Crime Act (or “VOCA”) Fund’s allocation to states has declined significantly, decreasing by 41 percent from FY2023 to FY2024.⁵⁰ This revenue comes from certain fines and penalties that are assessed on federal criminal cases, and are the primary way victims services programs get funded nationwide. The recent declines in that revenue stream put services around the country like medical care, temporary housing, and courtroom advocacy for victims of crime at risk of stalling or stopping due to insufficient funding.
- Between 2009 and 2021, Florida’s traffic ticket revenue dropped by 22 percent, with a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic that created a \$40–\$50 million budget hole. This instability forced operational cuts to various government agencies and nonprofit groups who were funded by this revenue stream. Court clerks reported having to eliminate positions from their budgets.⁵¹ At the same time, a nonprofit that works with police to publicize unsolved crimes said they would have to cut some resources to absorb the revenue instability. Another nonprofit, which provides services to people with epilepsy, reported a 78 percent drop in funding they received from state revenues for seat belt citations from 2014–2020. Though fewer citations indicated improved seat belt use, the state’s reliance on fines for funding led to service cuts—an issue that could have been avoided with more stable state funding.⁵²

As these examples show, state and local fine and fee revenue streams across the country can pose significant risks to government services if they decline over time, as Table 3 on the next page shows.



Table 3: Percentage Change in Median Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Collections from Previous Fiscal Year (FY)

Fiscal Period	FY2018-FY2019	FY2019-FY2020	FY2020-FY2021	FY2021-FY2022	Five-Year Change: FY2018 to FY2022
% Change in Median Collections	↓2.1%	↓22.6%	↓9.7%	↓2.7%	↓33.4%

Table 3 shows year-over-year change in median court-imposed fines and fees collections from FY2018 to FY2022 for the nineteen states that provided this data. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, collections were already declining by 2.1 percent compared to the previous year. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit during the last four months of FY2020, virtually all state revenue sources showed stark and immediate decreases, and the risks and realities of relying on the financial health of hard-working people to collect revenue became magnified.⁵³ Court-imposed fines and fees were no exception; our data shows median court collections dramatically dropped by 22.6 percent compared to the previous year and by another 9.7 percent in FY2021. Contributing factors to this change likely include heightened financial strain for people who owed fines and fees, as well as temporary operational changes in the criminal legal system as courts tried to adjust to unprecedented pandemic conditions.⁵⁴

Regardless of the main drivers, this revenue decline caused governments to lose funding they were relying on for expenses, at a time when new costs for COVID disaster relief programs skyrocketed and governments desperately needed cash resources to fund them.⁵⁵ Although federal pandemic aid eased fiscal pressures in later months, that does not discount the initial consequences of revenue volatility from sources like court-imposed fines and fees, nor the lasting problem of maintaining such a volatile revenue source after one-time supports, like aid from the federal American Recovery Plan Act, come to an end.⁵⁶

By mid-FY2021 and into FY2022, most states saw fiscal health indicators, like tax collections, rebounding and outpacing original forecasts.⁵⁷

However, court-imposed fines and fees collections did not experience the same rebound, and in many cases declined. Of the states for which we have data, the median collections amount decreased by another 2.7 percent from FY2021 to FY2022, and **the median change over the five-year period was a 33.4 percent decrease, meaning collections did not get anywhere close to pre-pandemic levels, even during the national economy's pandemic "rebound" period.** This contrast with other government revenue streams is notable. In the first quarter of 2022 (or halfway through most states' FY2022), state government tax revenue from major sources, including personal income tax, corporate income tax, sales tax, and property tax, increased 16.4 percent compared to the same period the prior year. Specifically, corporate income tax revenue increased by a whopping 109 percent,⁵⁸ demonstrating that other sources of government revenue were quicker and more likely to bounce back from crisis-era declines, and therefore were much more reliable in the long term.

The contrast between income from fines and fees, and income from other revenue sources, is not surprising and speaks to the senselessness of court-imposed fines and fees being used as a tax base, especially considering what we know about who largely bears the burden. The Tax Policy Center attributes the sharp improvements in state and local tax revenues in 2022 to stronger economic indicators – such as Gross Domestic Product, employment rate, and personal spending – as well as changes in tax law changes, including shifts in tax filing deadlines and deferments.⁵⁹ Yet, we know that people who owe fines and fees are more likely to be from low-income neighborhoods, and likely often struggled to pay off their debt even before the new levels of pandemic-driven financial strain.⁶⁰

When the COVID pandemic hit, tens of millions of people lost their jobs. Even as employment rates improved over the next year, many still experienced serious hardship, with 20 million households nationwide reporting not having enough to eat by the end of 2021.⁶¹ The subsequent improvement of the national economy (as seen in GDP gains), extension of one tax deadline, or even the promise of a pandemic relief check does not solve a fundamental inability to pay for many who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, court-ordered fines and fees likely went unpaid.



Zooming in on the General Fund: A Similar Story

The diminishing value of fines and fees revenue to governments becomes clearer when examining not only overall court fines and fees collection trends, but also trends among specific funds where the collection dollars are ultimately sent. To do this, we examined the flow of fines and fees revenue into jurisdictions' general funds. State and local general funds contain collected revenue from many major tax streams (i.e. income tax, property tax, sales tax) and other miscellaneous revenue streams (such as fines and fees). The general fund is the primary discretionary pot of money that lawmakers have to allocate funding for operations across most government agencies in a state or local jurisdiction.

The money collected from fines and fees is typically distributed across various state and local funds, including general funds, to pay for costs spanning many agencies and governmental functions. Given the state of today's public data and recordkeeping, as well as common limitations in government reporting systems, it is virtually impossible to trace all of a state's court-imposed fines and fees back to the many government funds into which they are deposited. It would take a level of forensic accounting and access to government records that is simply not available. However, tracking fines and fees sent specifically to each jurisdiction's general fund is much more feasible. A central fiscal office in each state generally manages the forecasting and accounting of how money flows into and out of the general fund and publishes reports that often disaggregate the budget *projections* (expectations of revenue for the coming year) and *actuals* (how much revenue is actually collected that year) for each revenue source that flows into the general fund. For the scope of this report, we examined how the amount of fines and fees deposited into general funds changed over time to further explore the value and effectiveness of fines and fees as a revenue source. Although this is a single fund, it nonetheless provides a valuable illustration of how fines and fees volatility affects budgets.

State General Funds

Across the fiscal offices that provided us with at least partial data, only one, South Dakota, indicated that no revenue from court-imposed fines and fees was directed into the state's general fund. Of the remaining states, 21 states had complete revenue data for all five years showing the amount of money from fines and fees that was deposited annually into the state General Fund.⁶²

Most of these 21 states directed us to their annual or quarterly general fund revenue forecasts for the relevant revenue data. This data had one common limitation. Their general fund reports often combine criminal and civil fines and fees (i.e. divorce or custody cases), and sometimes restitution, into one or more aggregate revenue lines, making it difficult to isolate changes specific to criminal and traffic-related fines and fees. It is troubling that so many state offices responsible for maintaining and forecasting their state's general fund were unable (or unwilling) to pinpoint the extent to which the general fund relies upon the continued criminalization and financial punishment of community members. Whenever possible, we manually isolate court-imposed fines and fees. Even in aggregate, however, the data from these revenue forecasts provide valuable additional insights into the decline in court-related fines and fees over time.

We found that fines and fees revenue generally makes up less than 0.7 percent of state general funds⁶³—barely a speck in state budgets. Yet, because each dollar of revenue gets programmed in budgets for a specific type of spending, relying on unstable fine and fee revenue still creates ripple effects and puts corresponding spending at risk, exposing the harms of using court debt as a funding source.

Among our subset of states, it represents an average of \$40 to \$50 million per year (depending on state and year) that is taken from court-involved people and used to fund various areas of general state operations alongside other tax streams. In other words, although the total of fines and fees revenue into the general fund may be small (less than 0.7 percent), volatility in collections creates

very real risks for governments, particularly when they need it to balance budgets. Moreover, because it is a relatively small percentage of state general funds, it is likely not a risk worth taking for governments and would be best replaced by a more sustainable and stable revenue stream.

Our trend analysis underscores this risk. **Among the responsive states, the median amount of fines and fees⁶⁴ deposited into the general fund decreased by 19 percent between FY2018 and FY2022.**⁶⁵ Table 4 details this finding across the five-year period. These year-to-year changes to fines and fees revenue deposited in state general funds closely mirror changes in overall court-imposed fines and fees collection trends, adding even more evidence to the finding that fines and fees are an ever-declining revenue stream and, therefore, risky for governments to use and depend upon. Yet it remains a consistently reliable source of harm to individuals who cannot afford to pay what is imposed on them.

Although the total amount of fines and fees revenue going into the general fund may be small (less than 0.7 percent), volatility in collections creates very real risks for governments, particularly when they need it to balance budgets.

**Table 4: Annual Percentage Change in Median Fines and Fees Revenue to the General Fund
(Compared to Total Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Collections)**

Fiscal Period	FY2018- FY2019	FY2019- FY2020	FY2020- FY2021	FY2021- FY2022	Five-Year Change: FY2018 to FY2022
Percent Change in Median Collections	↓ 2.1%	↓ 22.6%	↓ 9.7%	↓ 2.7%	↓ 33.4%
Percent Change in Median Fines and Fees Revenue To a State's General Fund	↓ 3.1%	↓ 10.6%	↓ 13.3%	↑ 8.1%	↓ 18.9%

For a subset of nine states, we were also able to gather court fines and fees revenue *projections* (expectations of revenue for the coming year, established at the time of budget adoption) to compare with revenue *actuals* (how much revenue actually ended up being collected that year). Comparing the ratio of actuals to projections shows that at least this subset of states was able to predict fairly reliably how much fines and fees revenue they would be able to bring into the general fund each year. This is an important finding because it indicates that at least some stakeholders in state government are aware of the declining trends that fines and fees revenue is showing and are adjusting their projections accordingly. In other words, this subset of states already appears to recognize – as least on the budgeting side – that fines and fees are an ever-diminishing revenue stream into the general fund.

Table 5: Annual Percentage Change Comparison for Median Statewide Collections, General Fund Actuals, and General Fund Projections of Court-Imposed Fines and Fees

Fiscal Period	FY2018- FY2019	FY2019- FY2020	FY2020- FY2021	FY2021- FY2022	Five-Year Change: FY2018 to FY2022
Percent Change in Median Collections	↓ 2.1%	↓ 22.6%	↓ 9.7%	↓ 2.7%	↓ 33.4%
Percent Change in Median Fines and Fees Revenue To a State's General Fund	↓ 3.1%	↓ 10.6%	↓ 13.3%	↑ 8.1%	↓ 18.9%
Percent Change in Median Fines and Fees Revenue Projections to the General Fund	↓ 1.5%	↓ 3.9%	↓ 3.0%	↓ 1.0%	↓ 9.0%

Table 5 shows that the decline in revenue projections trended in the same direction as actuals during the pre-pandemic years. We can see that even before the pandemic hit in March 2020 (towards the end of FY2020), state revenue forecasters were already projecting small decreases in fines and fees revenue to the General Fund for FY2019 and FY2020. In the following two fiscal years, even as general economic conditions began to improve, forecasters continued to lower their revenue projections for fines and fees to general funds, resulting in a nine percent decrease in projected revenue over the five-year period.

Considering both projections and actuals, court-imposed fines and fees show up as a declining revenue source that provides less and less value to the government each year. Though this is not enough to create a causal relationship, we can logically surmise that the decline is largely driven by people's continued inability to pay the exorbitant costs that are imposed on them by our justice systems. Therefore, we have to presume it is not likely to get better anytime soon.⁶⁶ If state agencies do indeed recognize this, those who are already decreasing their projections accordingly may be better off eliminating this as a revenue stream altogether, replacing it with other dollars that are more stable and reliable.

Governments Acknowledge Uncollectibility

Another way state governments directly acknowledge the practical issues of relying on a revenue source that attempts to extract money from already low-income communities is by assuming a certain level of imposed fines and fees as “uncollectible” revenue.

We asked each fiscal office about this practice, but most states were not able to give us data because they did not disaggregate revenue projections in enough detail. The following states, however, shared data on their assumptions around uncollectible fines and fees. The high rates of uncollectible assumptions we see in these state forecasts indicate that at least some states are well aware that using justice-involved people as a revenue stream is not reliable or efficient.

Rhode Island:

The state’s judicial office sent records suggesting that its forecasts assume, on average, that 80 percent of debt older than one year assessed in superior, district, and traffic courts is uncollectible and that a whopping 96 percent of debt that is at least five years old is assumed to be uncollectible.⁶⁷

Florida:

The Florida Clerks of Court Operations Collection Performance Measures Standards assume that only 9 percent of circuit criminal case costs, 9 percent of juvenile delinquency case costs, 40 percent of county criminal case costs, and 50 percent of criminal traffic costs will be collected.⁶⁸

North Dakota:

The state’s judicial office reported that 7 percent of criminal fines that are projected to be deposited into the state general fund are assumed to be uncollectible, while the state’s fiscal office indicated that 25 percent of criminal fees and traffic fines that are slated to go into the general fund are assumed uncollectible when actual projections are being made.

These examples underscore the contradictions of a system that persists in imposing fines and fees despite clear evidence that much of this debt will never be collected. If states are consistently assuming that large portions of court-imposed debt are uncollectible, it raises a fundamental question: why continue relying on a revenue stream that is both inefficient and punitive? Instead of acknowledging the inherent flaws in this model and seeking alternative funding mechanisms, governments double down on enforcement, penalizing individuals who are already financially strained. This practice not only burdens those least able to pay but also exposes the inefficiency of using the court system as a funding mechanism.

Municipal General Funds May Also See Declining Fines and Fees Revenue

Given that fine and fee revenue is distributed to both state and local funds, we would ideally review similar data on the actuals and projections from local jurisdictions' fiscal office to help determine whether the five-year trends observed at the state level also persist at the local level. However, given the thousands of local jurisdictions across the country, each with its own reporting practices and budget documents, this level of analysis was not feasible within the scope of this report. Instead, we searched for publicly available data for several localities across the country to conduct a case study analysis of local general fund trends. In five local case studies,⁶⁹ highlighted in Table 6, we saw the same trend of persistent court-imposed fines and fees revenue declines over the FY2018 - FY2022 period. Though not a nationally representative sample, the data from these local jurisdictions show that what happens at the state level can be mirrored in local general funds.

Table 6: Five-Year Percentage Change of Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Revenue to Local General Funds, FY2018-FY2022

Local Jurisdiction	FY2018 - FY2022 Percent Change
Philadelphia, PA	-27%
Colorado Springs, CO	-32%
DeKalb County, GA	-38%
Oklahoma City, OK	-29%
St. Louis City, MO	+16%

Of all these local jurisdictions, only St. Louis saw an increase in revenue over the 5-year period. The primary driver of that increase appears to come from City Court fines and fees (a revenue line which includes traffic violation fines and fees.) It is important to note, however, that St. Louis City

is a neighbor of Ferguson, Missouri (which sits in St. Louis County). Though not the subject of the DOJ investigation into Ferguson, St. Louis City had similar problems of overusing fines and fees, but had started to go through reforms to change their reliance on fines and fees, including certain state-mandated reforms.⁷⁰ The fact that St. Louis shows an increase in revenue should be seen in the context of it already being an outlier in fine and fee revenue generation, and being a jurisdiction in the midst of ongoing reform efforts during the study period. For this reason, we would caution against other jurisdictions viewing it as a standard example of local fine and fee trends across the country, rather than the cautionary tale it is.

The trends we observe suggest that court-imposed fines and fees are becoming increasingly less reliable and, therefore, less valuable to state and local government budgets. This decline underscores the need for clearer data reporting systems on fines and fees. The fact that so many states and localities are incapable of answering some of the most basic questions related to the scope of fines and fees imposed by their courts, how much is collected, and where that money goes signals that they are not bothering to ask themselves these basic questions key to public and fiscal policy. Conversely, those states that are aware, and which are projecting less revenue over time accordingly, are knowingly choosing to depend on a failing revenue stream that disproportionately harms individuals and communities. This dependence is particularly troubling given the severe impact on those who cannot afford to pay. More comprehensive and transparent data on collections could help shift government focus towards more sustainable and equitable sources of revenue, potentially reducing the harm inflicted on vulnerable populations. Until then, governments that maintain this revenue practice will continue to subject low-income and working families to significant financial burdens and harsh penalties for those who cannot afford to pay, while also failing as a stable revenue source.

Harsh Penalties for Nonpayment for People Who Can't Afford to Pay

Throughout this report, we have repeatedly discussed the impact on people who are unable to pay their fines and fees and the harm that such a debt burden can place upon them. Consequences for nonpayment of court fines and fees can be extensive and vary by jurisdiction. Table 7 provides a list of some of the more common consequences that can stem for someone who lacks the ability to pay court-imposed fines and fees:

Table 7: Economic, Legal and Social & Civic Penalties for Nonpayment of Court-Imposed Fines and Fees.		
Economic Penalties	Legal Penalties	Social & Civic Penalties
Denial of public benefits	Driver's License Suspension (DLS)	Inability to serve on a jury
Denial of professional licenses	Failure to appear warrant	Denial of voting rights
Denial of local public grants (like small business loans or first-time homeowner subsidies)	Failure to pay warrant	Stress
Job loss (due to license suspension, background checks, etc)	Incarceration for nonpayment	Denial of hunting/fishing licenses
Negative mark on credit report	Probation (for nonpayment) or probation extension (for failure to pay full amount by the end of probation)	Denial of housing applications (due to credit risk on background checks)
Late payment fees	Vehicle registration holds	Difficulties sealing one's record
Interest on unpaid debt	Contempt of court charges	
Additional fees to get on a payment plan	Custody issues	
Private collections (cost, hassle, litigation)	Civil judgments for unpaid criminal or traffic fines and fees	
Property liens	Parole and probation revocation	
Wage garnishment		
Increase car insurance rates (due to license suspensions or registration holds)		
Having to forgo food, rent, healthcare, or other necessities to pay the debt		

This list does not fully capture the myriad ways a person's life can be disrupted when they cannot afford to pay court-imposed fines and fees. However, it highlights both the direct penalties stemming from court orders and the broader repercussions that arise because of such orders. A recent study on the consequences of fines and fees found that among adults with only traffic or parking ticket debt, 15 percent experienced housing hardship, 20 percent struggled with utility bills, and 22 percent faced financial insecurity.⁷¹ While these numbers are concerning, the disparities become even more stark for those with criminal court or incarceration-related debt. Nearly 30 percent of this group reported housing hardship—almost double the rate of those with traffic fines—while 40 percent faced utility hardship and 45 percent struggled with financial insecurity.⁷² The most striking difference is in food hardship, with 57 percent of adults with court or incarceration-related debt experiencing food insecurity, compared to 32 percent of those with traffic fines and just 25 percent of those without fines or fees.⁷³ These figures paint a clear picture: the financial burden of court-imposed debt extends far beyond the justice system, destabilizing people's ability to meet basic needs and deepening financial precarity.

Beyond the direct court sanctions, the imposition of fines and fees sets off a cascade of secondary consequences. These include economic penalties such as wage and tax garnishment or interest on unpaid debts, which in turn exacerbate poverty and destabilize lives. Such outcomes, while not directly mandated by court orders, arise as a result of the court-imposed fines and fees, creating long-lasting barriers to financial and social stability.

For many, the inability to pay leads directly to a bench warrant for failure to pay or for failure to appear at a court hearing regarding the debt. These warrants not only put individuals at risk of immediate incarceration and additional penalties, but they also perpetuate cycles of poverty and instability. Bench warrants exemplify a direct consequence that courts can readily track, underscoring the criminalization of poverty when someone's financial inability triggers legal penalties.



Arresting People Facing Financial Hardship: The Use of Bench Warrants

Bench warrants are legal enforcement tools issued by courts to arrest individuals who allegedly violate court orders. Some of the most common bench warrants are those for failure to pay (FTP) fines or fees or failure to appear (FTA) at a required court hearing. These warrants disproportionately penalize low-income people who do not have the ability to pay their court-imposed debts. Effectively, whenever a judge issues a bench warrant, law enforcement must arrest and detain the person until they can be brought before the court. In many instances, the person may wait in jail for multiple days before seeing a judge.

Although courts have the option to simply issue a summons directing the person to come to court on a later date, many courts take a “warrant first, ask questions later” approach that raises significant constitutional concerns. The United States Supreme Court has long held that a person may not be incarcerated for failure to pay court debt unless that failure to pay was willful.⁷⁴ In other words, courts may not jail people for nonpayment unless the person (1) has the ability to pay the fine and fees and (2) simply refuses to do so. Nevertheless, it remains common practice in some jurisdictions to issue bench warrants and seize people off the streets based solely on the mere fact of nonpayment, without any evidence the person is actually capable of paying.⁷⁵ Even if the arrest is for a short duration, it remains unconstitutional unless there is specific evidence that, on the day they were required to pay, the person had the ability to do so and chose not to. Yet, this practice remains common across the country.

Using Bench Warrants as a Predatory Debt Enforcement Tool

Although FTP warrants are clearly for nonpayment of a fine or fee, FTA warrants are often just a different kind of warrant for nonpayment, particularly when the hearing at which the person did not appear has a financial aspect. A person may fail to appear in court for various reasons, many of which are the result of systemic barriers related to financial status, rather than willful disregard of a court order to come to court.⁷⁶ However, when the hearing is for the purpose of addressing nonpayment, many also fear they will be jailed if they do not have the money, often because the court or some other person in the legal system threatened this would happen. In practice, many, if not most, FTA warrants are still about a lack of money.

Although there can be legitimate concerns about individuals missing hearings, the knee-jerk reaction to arrest and detain is unnecessary. In fact, many other stakeholders – from police to prosecutors to defense attorneys – miss court hearings with regularity. Yet, the severe sanction of a warrant is not regularly imposed upon them, despite their obligation to attend. For example, ten years of court data in Philadelphia showed that police officers failed to appear in 31 percent of cases where they were subpoenaed, compared to a 19 percent failure to appear rate for defendants during that same period.⁷⁷

The issue of bench warrants for nonpayment is compounded in the 17 states where minor traffic offenses are classified as criminal, rather than civil violations.⁷⁸ As a result, if someone receives a traffic citation in these states and does not pay or resolve the ticket before their court hearing, they can be held in contempt of court or even face new criminal charges. The criminalization of minor traffic offenses fuels the widespread issuance of FTA bench warrants where the primary offense is nonpayment. When unpaid citations lead to warrants, what begins as a simple traffic violation quickly escalates into more severe criminal sanctions. Beyond being arrested on a warrant, the person is now exposed to potential jail time,

probation, or other ongoing criminal sanctions. These types of bench warrants would often be labeled simply as FTA, making it very difficult to identify all of the bench warrants that are ultimately about nonpayment. Even in states where traffic is a civil offense, the only people typically required to attend court are those wishing to challenge the citation or those who cannot afford to pay it on time.

FTA and FTP bench warrants are inherently linked in our criminal and traffic legal systems. Prior to February 2020, Rhode Island Judiciary issued bench warrants classified as failure to *appear* when the underlying issue was an inability to *pay*,⁷⁹ showcasing that FTA bench warrants are in fact issued for nonpayment in some jurisdictions. The fact that it's unknown how many courts throughout the country engage in the same practice, does not erase the reality that people are being punished, not for dangerous behavior, but for their inability to pay.

Warrants issued for nonpayment are, in essence, a poverty penalty, whether they are classified as FTA or FTP bench warrants. An analysis of administrative court data from New Mexico's magistrate courts found that the average outstanding fine and fee debt triggering an FTP bench warrant was \$350. In addition to this debt, the court imposed a \$100 fee for issuing the bench warrant.⁸⁰ Rather than addressing the root causes of nonpayment — such as economic hardship and systemic inequities — FTA and FTP bench warrants are punitive measures that only exacerbate financial distress. The threat of arrest often forces individuals to hide, avoiding essential services and future court dates out of fear. The cascading consequences of warrants can create long-term instability for individuals and their families, contributing to a cycle of poverty and criminalization.

Data from Las Vegas Municipal Court from 2012 to 2020 highlight the disproportionate impact of bench warrants. There, 83 percent of bench warrants were issued against individuals who failed to pay or appear in court for traffic citations, and 57.1 percent of those were concentrated in ZIP codes with median incomes below \$56,354—

many of which are among the lowest wage-earning areas in Clark County. Additionally, Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander individuals in Las Vegas disproportionately had warrants for administrative charges (such as maintenance and inspection issues or not having insurance or proper registration) making up 69 percent of people with open warrants, further illustrating the racial disparities inherent in this system.⁸¹

Despite these alarming trends, many courts simply do not keep track of the number of FTP or FTA warrants issued. Although many courts undoubtedly issue FTA warrants for nonpayment of fines or fees, the lack of detailed record-keeping makes it nearly impossible to identify where this occurs, often resulting in underreporting of bench warrants related to nonpayment. This data is necessary to determine how harmful financially-based bench warrants are and whether any evidence exists that such warrants promote compliance.

Data Show the Staggering Use of Bench Warrants

Given the concerns with using bench warrants as a debt enforcement tool to criminalize the inability to pay, we asked all 50 states and the District of Columbia to provide data on FTA and FTP bench warrants issued from FY2018 to FY2022 as part of our broader public records requests. Only 12 states provided any bench warrant data.⁸² Judicial offices in Colorado, Vermont, and Rhode Island responded they do not issue any warrants for failure to pay fines and fees. Many of the other states that did not provide us with this data communicated they were unable to discern the reasons for warrants because their case management systems were not coded to do so.

Between FY2018 and FY2022, 13 states alone issued more than 2.5 million bench warrants.⁸³

To put that into some perspective, that is more bench warrants than the entire population of New Mexico.⁸⁴

Of the 13 states that provided warrant data, eight had data specific to FTP warrants.⁸⁵ Those eight states issued a combined total of 113,083 warrants

against people simply because they had not paid a court debt. All 13 states that responded with warrant data issued FTA warrants, for a combined total of 2,460,167 warrants for not appearing in court. While not all FTA bench warrants can be directly linked to nonpayment or court debt avoidance, even if just a small percent were related to debt, that is still hundreds of thousands of warrants.

For example, Colorado provided FTA bench warrant data disaggregated by felony, misdemeanor, and traffic offenses. Over the five-year period, the data revealed that 216,866 FTA warrants—nearly 45 percent of the total—were issued for traffic cases. In Colorado, whether a ticket is for a minor infraction or a more serious criminal traffic offense like reckless driving, a person is required to either pay the fine within 20 days (which means pleading guilty) or they will be required to come to court to address it on the date reflected in the citation.⁸⁶ Failing to pay the fine and then failing to appear in court will result in a bench warrant. In this way, just under half of FTA warrants in Colorado are related to nonpayment at some level. Similarly, Missouri reported that of all its FTA warrants, 80,342 (or 11.5 percent) were in traffic cases, which have a similar requirement to pay in advance or report to court at the date on the ticket.⁸⁷

This massive number of warrants from a relatively small number of states reflects a heavy reliance on arrest and incarceration as a tool to enforce payment. The practice of “arrest first, ask questions later” criminalizes poverty and ignores the fact that many people simply do not have the resources to comply with what the court has ordered. The true cost of using judicial resources to issue warrants, law enforcement resources to locate and apprehend individuals, and the daily cost of incarceration once they are in custody remains unknown, though it is sure to be costly given the number of system stakeholders and resources required for each warrant issued and enforced.⁸⁸ For example, if each warrant hypothetically cost just \$100 of staff time and resources, governments could be spending over \$250 million on this process. Even at just \$10 per warrant, this represents an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars.

The use of bench warrants related to nonpayment of fines and fees is a shortsighted and overly punitive response to noncompliance. This approach prioritizes immediate enforcement over long-term solutions, failing to address the root causes of nonpayment — such as financial hardship, job instability, and systemic barriers to economic mobility. Arresting individuals for unpaid fines and fees does not improve their ability to pay; instead, it disrupts employment, and strains families, ultimately creating greater financial instability. Additionally, the practice burdens law enforcement and jails with unnecessary costs, diverting resources away from more pressing public safety concerns.

Instead, courts should implement fairer, more effective alternatives to bench warrants — such as income-based payment plans, community service options, or debt forgiveness — to break the cycle of criminalizing poverty. Without these reforms, FTP and FTA bench warrants will continue to act as a poverty penalty, exacerbating existing disparities and causing long-lasting harm to vulnerable individuals and their communities, all while providing diminishing returns to government revenue streams. Eliminating the use of bench warrants for nonpayment is not just a matter of fairness — it is a necessary step toward a more just and fiscally responsible legal system.



Using State Debt Collection Agencies as a Tool to Raise Revenue When People Are Unable to Pay Off Debts Quickly: A Utah Example

Using law enforcement is not the only method courts employ to enforce payment compliance. Our research uncovered another significant practice: the use of state agencies as debt collectors. FFJC identified several states where courts rely on state agencies equipped with an array of financial enforcement tools and extensive legal authority to seize funds from individuals. California⁸⁹ and Rhode Island,⁹⁰ are notable examples, but we will use Utah to illustrate how this works in practice.

In response to our inquiries, Utah's judicial office reported that after 90 days of delinquency, all state courts (courts of general jurisdiction) and some justice courts (courts of limited jurisdiction) transfer unpaid debts to the Office of State Debt Collection (OSDC), a state agency responsible for collecting and managing debts owed to the state, including court-ordered debts.⁹¹ **Between FY2018 and FY2022, Utah courts transferred \$56 million in outstanding criminal court debt to OSDC.**

Once OSDC takes possession of this debt, state law allows the agency to impose late fees of up to 10 percent of the amount owed, plus other fees to cover administrative costs, attorney fees, and other costs related to collection. The office can also charge interest of up to 2 percent above the prime rate each fiscal year, or as determined by the courts.⁹²

For 2024 alone, OSDC reported the following for its fees and interest rates:⁹³

- A late penalty of 6 percent of the principal,
- A collection fee equivalent to 15.5 percent of the total amount collected,
- An interest rate of 10.5 percent annually, and
- Where applicable, the current year's post-judgment interest rate established by the state courts: 6.81 percent annually (applies to accounts with court judgments entered this calendar year).

To illustrate how this can play out in practice, imagine that a person owes \$400 in unpaid court debt when it is transferred to OSDC. That person is immediately charged an additional \$24 in late fees. If it takes that person an entire year to pay off the debt, they could

also owe \$73.39 as accrued interest, plus collection fees totaling approximately \$77.10. This addition of \$174.48 in fees and interest brings the total owed to \$574.48⁹⁴— nearly 44 percent more than what someone who could afford to pay on time would have to pay. This system penalizes poverty, forcing those least able to pay into a cycle of escalating debt.

Debt collected by the OSDC is placed into the State Debt Collection Fund, which supports OSDC's administrative, legal, and operational costs, as well as training for other state agencies.⁹⁵ According to statute any interest earned on the fund is deposited into the state's general fund.⁹⁶

In order to enforce collection of this compounding debt, state law grants the OSDC several debt collection tools, including: reporting debt to credit bureaus, contracting with private collection agencies, garnishing wages, placing liens on property, seeking court judgments, and using administrative offsets (such as intercepting tax refunds).⁹⁷ The enforcement tools available to the state when seeking to collect unpaid court debt far exceed those of any private company could use to enforce an outstanding debt, like credit card payments, medical debt, or unpaid rent. The state wields significantly more power to harm those whose financial hardship makes paying difficult.

State debt collection agencies intensify the inequities of the criminal legal system's two-tiered justice structure. Individuals who can promptly pay their court debt exit the system quickly, while those unable to pay face prolonged involvement with the government and criminal legal systems. This dynamic disproportionately impacts people without the resources to settle their debts immediately, causing their financial burdens to snowball.

The OSDC's role as a revenue-generating agency — channeling funds into its own budget and the state general fund through fees and interest — highlights a state reliance on fines and fees at the expense of peoples' financial recovery. This model, focusing on generating income rather than supporting individuals' economic stability, reinforces systemic cycles of poverty and undermines long-term rehabilitation for justice-involved individuals.

Recommendations

In 2021, FFJC published a report that revealed at least \$27 billion in unpaid court debt across the country that accumulated over decades – a figure that, in reality, is far higher due to widespread underreporting, limited government data systems, and poor government transparency practices. Nearly five years later, our new investigation reveals the extent to which states continue to impose, collect, and funnel court-ordered fines and fees into state general funds at the expense of individual, family, and community economic stability. This picture, incomplete though it may be, clearly exposes a broken revenue system that is simply not worth the deep burdens and harmful consequences it imposes on those with court-ordered fines and fees. Our data show that the current system, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty and injustice, makes for an unsound revenue source for governments and budgets.


To address these issues and create a more equitable and effective approach to fines and fees, a series of reforms are necessary. FFJC offers five key recommendations that decision-makers can take to alleviate the financial burdens placed on individuals, reduce harmful enforcement practices, stabilize government budgets, and promote fairer outcomes within the criminal legal system.

1. Eliminate all justice system fees.

Court fees (also known as costs, surcharges, assessments, or court taxes) are used to fund everything from the justice system to general operation and programming at the state and local levels. Additionally, poor reporting and transparency practices makes the collection of these fees a far less transparent process than most other tax systems. This regressive and opaque system is now entrenched in jurisdictions across the United States and has created perverse incentives to maximize revenue by jurisdictions that become dependent on fees to balance budgets. The findings from our report show that fees make up more than half of all financial obligations in criminal and traffic courts, which highlights how large of a financial burden this system puts on court-involved people, their families, and the broader community, while it creates an ever-decreasing and, therefore, unstable source of revenue for governments.

Eliminating all fees from the justice system would not only reduce the financial burden on individuals, but it would also refocus justice system goals away from maximizing revenue and back on serving everyone fairly and justly. Without fees, fines will continue to play a role in the traffic and criminal legal systems as an alternative to more severe punishments. However, fines still need to be proportional to the offense and within a person's ability to pay in order to be constitutional. Without fees, jurisdictions can focus on rightsizing fine policies to better promote justice. Moreover, without the financial pressure of fees, court-involved people can focus on rehabilitation and community reintegration rather than worrying about penalties created to punish their poverty. Removing fees can also lead to more sustainable and responsible budgets, as reliance on the unstable revenue from these fees can create unpredictable fiscal outcomes for governments. Ultimately, eliminating all justice fees is a step towards a more equitable and just legal system.

Many states have made encouraging progress in recent years to eliminate court fees, but it is imperative that more states and localities follow suit. For more on state and local fee elimination reforms around the country, please visit the [End Justice Fees campaign website](#).



Public policy and fiscal decisionmaking should be based on sound data, not gut feelings or a misguided sense of “this is how we have always done it.”

2. End government dependence on court-imposed fine and fee revenue streams by replacing them with more stable and sustainable funding sources.

The findings from this report suggest that court-imposed fines and fees are an unstable revenue source for governments. Over the 5-year period of this study, both overall court collections and revenue deposited into state general funds have declined. This finding, in addition to existing research showing that the process of tracking and collecting fines and fees revenue is costly and inefficient,⁹⁸ highlights the risk of relying on fines and fees.

To mitigate this risk, lawmakers should end their dependency by removing fine and fee revenue streams from public budgets and replacing them with alternative revenue bases that are more stable, reliable, and equitable. Governments can best achieve this by implementing the previous recommendation and eliminating all justice fees, which would naturally end the revenue stream from each eliminated fee and remove that revenue dependence from government budgets. Any remaining fine or fee revenue should not be included as a relied-upon source of funding in any state, local, or agency budget. Instead, that revenue could be directed to one-time discretionary projects, reserved funds, or other programming that will not then become dependent on it being replenished year after year. Given the volatility of fines and fees as a revenue source, many systems are already adjusting to a reality without significant portions of that revenue stream. So, finding alternatives is often easier than it might appear at first glance. Lawmakers would need to decide whether replacing “lost” revenue is necessary, and if so, how to replace it with a more stable and reliable funding source (such as non-fee-based state or local general fund dollars or reliable special taxes) or take other measures to absorb the revenue loss (like reallocating planned spending).

We recognize that the best fiscal strategies for achieving this are dependent on a variety of local considerations and may differ across jurisdictions. There are many paths governments can take to remove fine and fee revenue from public budgets, including adjusting existing tax policy, creating new tax streams, adjusting revenue paths and projections over time, holding revenue in reserve funds, or consolidating planned expenditures to absorb any revenue loss. Regardless of the solution, eliminating budget dependence on unstable fine and fee revenue will stabilize those budgets.

3. Bench warrants should only be used to address threats to public safety and never as a tool to collect debt.

Courts should eliminate the use of bench warrants for nonpayment because they lead to unnecessary arrests and incarceration without considering an individual's financial circumstances. This cycle of punishment does not address the root issue—an individual's inability to pay—but instead exacerbates their financial insecurity and further entangles them in the criminal legal system.

Rather than relying on punitive measures that disrupt lives and strain government resources, courts should adopt more equitable and effective alternatives. Income-based payment plans, expanded and flexible community service options, and automatic waivers for those unable to pay would ensure that financial penalties do not translate into jail time for those facing financial hardship. Removing bench warrants for failure to pay or failure to appear at a hearing about financial obligations would reduce unnecessary incarceration and mitigate the disproportionate harm imposed on low-income individuals. Courts have other enforcement tools to encourage payment or court appearances beyond the extreme response of arrest and jailing. The fact that states around the country have successfully changed bench warrant practices shows that it is possible. Eliminating debt-related bench warrants not only promotes fairness but it also reduces the administrative and financial burden on courts, law enforcement, and jails.



4. Discharge old court-imposed fines and fees debt.

Debt waivers is a compassionate and practical approach to criminal justice reform. Though it does not solve the systemic issues of using fines and fees as a revenue-generating scheme, discharging older, unpaid court debt can provide a fresh start for individuals facing financial hardship. Because, in many cases, budgets are already anticipating that much of this money is uncollectable, discharging that debt often does not have any fiscal impact (i.e. no revenue holes are created that would require other sources of revenue to backfill them).

Yet, when unpaid court debts are a significant burden to individuals, it often leads to even more (often unpayable) fees, interest charges, and employment barriers. In just under half of the states, a person's driver's license can be suspended for nonpayment of court debt, further limiting job opportunities. By wiping away these debts, individuals can regain access to critical resources like employment, education, and housing, contributing to their overall well-being and contributions to society. It can also alleviate stress and improve mental health for those impacted by court-imposed debts, leading to more stable communities.

In the last few years, several states have successfully waived old debt without any significant impact on their bottom lines. For example:

- In 2022, New Jersey [eliminated public defender fees](#) statewide⁹⁹ and forgave \$100 million in outstanding debt from that one fee alone. The budget was not dependent on the \$100M in unpaid debt, meaning it cost the state nothing to discharge it.¹⁰⁰
- In 2021, Colorado [eliminated all juvenile fines and fees](#)¹⁰¹ and vacated an estimated \$10.4 million in outstanding balances owed at that time. The [fiscal note](#)¹⁰² accompanying the bill noted that it is impossible to know what portion of unpaid debt would have ever been paid, but acknowledges the state likely need not backfill any amount from these outstanding balances.
- In 2020, California [ended 23 fees](#) related to the criminal legal process¹⁰³ and discharged outstanding debt for these fees. The [fiscal note](#) accompanying many of the reforms¹⁰⁴ noted that “the fees lead to inefficient use of resources, are unstable sources of revenue for governments, and drive low-income people into greater debt.” Although the legislation appropriated \$65 million in General Fund to backfill annual revenue loss, the Policy Advocacy Clinic at Berkeley Law estimated that the extent of unpaid debt that was discharged as part of these reforms amounted to a whopping [\\$16 billion](#),¹⁰⁵ – far, far more than what was accounted for in the budget backfill.

5. Mandate better data collection and transparency practices for court-imposed fines and fees.

The lack of transparent and meaningful fines and fees data posed significant challenges at nearly every stage of analysis for this report. Even fewer state judicial offices provided data in response to our public records request than did for our 2019 *Tip Of the Iceberg* report, indicating that government reporting systems on fines and fees – and their willingness to be transparent with the data — has not improved in the last five years. With half of state judicial and fiscal offices either denying our public record requests or failing to have other publicly available data, we lack a comprehensive picture of how fines and fees practices impact individuals and governments throughout the country. The fact that so many state court systems were unwilling or unable to answer our simple data questions suggests that they likely lack the will or capacity to answer these questions for themselves.

To address these issues, all states should maintain a centralized reporting system that collects, monitors, and transparently reports detailed information about fines and fees. This system should include detailed information on impositions, collections, use of ability to pay assessments and waivers, and the allocation of revenue. Reporting systems for this data should be able to easily disaggregate these data by year, jurisdiction, race and gender of the individual, and offense type (i.e., criminal, traffic, municipal ordinance, or juvenile). It should also indicate where revenue for each type of fine or fee is deposited and allocated in state or local budgets. This would provide insight into whether the current system is working as intended, would help identify disparities, and would allow for evidence-based reforms that can reduce harm, increase fairness, and improve the overall efficiency of the criminal legal system.

When data on the imposition of fines and fees and the revenue it generates is publicly available, it allows for oversight of how these monetary sanctions are being applied and what kind of impact debt enforcement measures are having. This level of transparency helps to identify any disparities in the system, particularly in how fines and fees affect low-income individuals and communities of color. Robust data on fines and fees impositions and collections also provide policymakers with critical insight into the volatility of funding streams necessary for good fiscal policy decisions. Public policy and fiscal decision-making should be based on sound data, not gut feelings or a misguided sense of “this is how we have always done it.”

States should also work towards a single reporting framework that is overseen by a central authority and enables comprehensive and consistent reporting between state and local courts. Many state judicial offices were unable to provide local court data. This lack of uniform data collection builds on the broader challenge of transparency highlighted in this report.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

The Fines and Fees Justice Center (FFJC) submitted public record requests to state judicial offices in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each request sought data on the amount of fines and fees imposed and collected from FY2018 to FY2022, as well as data on failure to pay (FTP) and failure to appear (FTA) warrants issued during this period. Requests were primarily made through email, with online public request portals or forms used as a secondary method. In certain states, requests were facilitated through local partners per local rules.

The research team focused on state judicial offices as the primary recipients of the data requests because they are typically best positioned to have comprehensive data from both state and local courts through centralized case management systems and because lower courts may be required to report to state judicial officials. Where states lacked centralized data, we classified the states as unable to provide the data. Although obtaining some of this data might have been possible from individual lower courts, that would have required coordinating with thousands of separate entities at the state, county, and municipal levels. Undertaking that effort would have required millions of dollars in funding, and taken teams of researchers years to complete, something that far exceeded the capacity of this project. Even still, six states¹⁰⁶ required payment to compile the data specified in our public record requests either due to the strain fulfilling our request placed on their operational capacity or because their current data systems required extra analysis or reprogramming to provide the requested information. These payments not only create a financial barrier to accessing critical information but could also serve as a tactic to discourage transparency and delay the release of data.

Data received from judicial offices were combined with data found in online public documents, all of which were compiled into spreadsheets. The research team organized the information into three primary categories for comparison: how much was

imposed in fines and fees, how much was collected, and the number of bench warrants issued related to nonpayment or failure to appear at a hearing. Within each category, data were sorted by state and by fiscal year to facilitate year-over-year comparisons. For data that was disaggregated by offense type or type of monetary sanction, additional spreadsheets were created to allow for more granular analysis within these categories.

To obtain a high-level overview of fines, fees, and warrants, we used descriptive statistics to calculate totals and medians for each category. We chose the median as the best metric to avoid skewing overall trends caused by extreme outliers.¹⁰⁷ We then conducted trend analyses to identify changes in the imposition and collection of court-ordered fines and fees over time, as well as trends in bench warrant issuance for failure to pay and failure to appear at a court hearing.

Additionally, we separately asked each state fiscal office for data on how much revenue from these fines and fees is specifically deposited into the state's general fund.¹⁰⁸ Responsive data were similarly compiled into spreadsheets, sorted by state and by fiscal year, and analyzed to identify revenue changes over time. Though it was not logistically feasible to send public records requests to all cities and counties, we also searched public budget documents in a sample of large cities and counties across the country to identify how much in fines and fees were deposited to local general funds. Through this process, we were able to identify five local case studies to compare with our state revenue findings.

Data from both judicial office and fiscal offices can be found in the appendices. In rare occasions, a state fulfilled the public records request only upon agreement that raw data would not be published. In that instance, we excluded that information from the appendices. Nonetheless, that data was included in our overall report analysis.

State Responses to Requests for Public Data

In response to our public records request, 25 judicial offices and 26 fiscal offices (not necessarily from the same states) provided partial or complete data or otherwise had public reports online where some relevant data or information could be accessed. The remaining states either denied our data request (25 judicial offices and 22 fiscal offices) or did not respond despite multiple follow-up attempts (one judicial office and three fiscal offices). Data from the responsive states and data from online public documents resulted in usable imposition data for 24 states, collections data for 19 states, general fund revenue data for 21 states, and warrant data for 12 states. A summary of state office responses is provided below in Table 8.

The reasons varied among the 26 judicial offices that did not provide data. Seven state judicial offices denied our request, stating their offices were not subject to public records laws and, therefore, were opting not to disclose.¹⁰⁹ Thirteen judicial offices stated that their offices do not collect the requested data,¹¹⁰ and some suggested we reach out to individual county-level or municipal courts. Four judicial offices communicated that fulfilling the request would be too resource-intensive to comply,¹¹¹ while one other, after some initial questions or clarification regarding our inquiry, ultimately stopped responding to our outreach and provided no data.¹¹² Finally, one state did not respond to any of our inquiries related to this issue, despite repeated attempts.¹¹³ Details on state-by-state responses to our Judicial Office records request are available in Appendix H.

Responses from fiscal offices to our requests regarding how much fine and fee revenue was forecasted and deposited each year in state general funds also varied widely. Of the 25 states from which we were unable to obtain data, three offices did not respond to our request or follow-up communication; twelve offices reported having no responsive records without providing any further detail; and another ten offices cited specific reasons for not providing the data. One of these states—California—replied that the responsive

records were being withheld because the records are part of the Governor’s “deliberative decision-making process” and presumably considered confidential. One state, South Dakota, responded that no court-imposed fines or fees were deposited into the state’s general fund. Four states indicated that they did not track revenue in sufficient detail for this request,¹¹⁴ and another four states¹¹⁵ indicated that they did not handle the forecasting for these fines or fees and suggested reaching out to the courts. Details on state-by-state responses to our Fiscal Office records request are available in Appendix D.

Table 8: Summary of Data Provided by State Offices and Justification for Denials

Public Records Response	Judicial Offices	Fiscal Offices
Provided partial or full data or public data was found online without request needed	25	26
<i>Partial</i>	13	5
<i>Full</i>	12	21
Denied: offices do not collect requested data or does not collect at the required level of detail	13	8
Denied: request would be too resource-intensive to fulfill	4	-
Denied: cited no responsive records	-	12
Denied: legally exempt/not required to provide the information	7	1
Denied: no funds from fines/fees sent to the general fund	-	1
No response given	2	3
Total	51	51

Challenges & Limitations

The comprehensiveness of this report is limited by the variations in data by jurisdiction. Half of the states provided no data at all, while others provided only partial data. States that provided partial data often had felony, misdemeanor, and traffic level statistics, but lacked access to municipal court data, which was often only kept locally. As a result, data available to FFJC for this report likely grossly underestimates the total amount of court fines and fees imposed, collected, and used as revenue at the state level. Additionally, the state fiscal offices that provided general fund revenue data often combined both civil and criminal fines and fees into an aggregate revenue line, making it difficult to isolate the portion of fines and fees revenue from the criminal legal system specifically. However, after doing our best to manually separate civil versus criminal fines and fees revenue data where possible, we included some aggregated data in our analysis because it still reveals important findings about fines and fees revenue and government dependence on that revenue. For example, for state data which incorporates some civil fees, the closely tied nature of civil and criminal fine and fee imposition (i.e. for traffic cases or city ordinances) makes even the aggregate findings relevant to this report.

Beyond directly requesting this information from governments, there are limited options for obtaining a clear picture of how fines and fees revenue flow through government budgets. For example, the U.S. Census Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances reports state and local collections of fines, fees, and forfeitures, but this revenue category often includes non-court-related fees and fines as well. It also does not disaggregate forfeitures from fines or fees, making it nearly impossible to isolate how much revenue specifically stems from court-imposed financial obligations in the criminal legal system.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, although all states and local governments report their revenues in various financial and budget documents each year, these documents frequently combine revenue from court-imposed fines and fees with other types of revenue that are unrelated (just as the U.S. Census report does),

making disaggregation by outsiders impossible. Additionally, outdated internal data reporting systems in many jurisdictions often prevent clear data sharing among courts and other agencies that receive and spend down court-collected fines and fees.

Although these limitations speak to the need for better data collection and transparency practices, the data we received from 25 judicial offices and 26 budget offices still gave us some essential information about how much courts are burdening individuals with fines and fees and to what extent states are using that revenue to fund state operations. Although incomplete, it is nonetheless valuable and illustrative.

Finally, this report examines court fines and fees imposition, collection, and government revenue during a time period that includes the period of peak impact from COVID-19. We recognize that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 (coinciding with the final months of FY2020) prompted significant shifts in many courts' operations, which likely temporarily affected how much fines and fees were imposed by courts. Though the scope of this report did not allow for an in-depth analysis of court operational changes during the pandemic, we examined COVID-responsive policies in each state for which we had data. While we found that many courts changed practices that likely slowed or paused court fines and fees impositions or collections temporarily,¹¹⁷ these changes were usually localized at the city or county level and were generally short-term, with most policies lifted by the end of 2020. For these reasons, we concluded that their impact on state-level fines and fees revenue over the totality of FY2020 and FY2021 was not likely a primary factor in our findings over the full five-year period.

Appendices

Appendix A: Court-Imposed Fines and Fees

This chart reflects data from state judicial offices, showing the amount of fines and fees imposed for each fiscal year. Two states, New Jersey and New York, reported their court-imposed fines and fees data by calendar year. A dash (–) indicates that the state did not provide data for that fiscal year.

State	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY18-22 Sum
Alaska	\$25,023,510	\$26,146,218	\$26,194,934	\$21,346,222	\$25,053,533	\$123,764,417
Arkansas	\$55,623,685	\$65,798,698	\$54,356,572	\$55,161,163	\$52,645,614	\$283,585,733
Colorado	\$121,843,894	\$123,367,154	\$102,445,832	\$79,712,726	\$85,115,060	\$512,484,666
Florida	\$839,407,680	\$880,101,088	\$606,506,123	\$709,364,963	\$728,747,323	\$3,764,127,177
Idaho	\$37,548,935	\$63,784,458	\$61,690,985	\$60,126,581	\$59,137,907	\$282,288,866
Iowa	\$251,716,303.33	\$243,183,985.79	\$203,371,316.80	\$252,153,140.96	\$208,720,400.34	\$1,159,145,147.22
Kansas	\$62,763,334.63	\$61,634,067.05	\$48,719,444.28	\$41,649,073.89	\$51,451,231.76	\$266,217,151.61
Maine	\$26,013,262.12	\$23,888,609.45	\$16,216,486.25	\$15,112,326.88	\$15,584,954.36	\$96,815,639.06
Maryland	\$83,071,246.07	\$81,146,647.77	\$68,447,349.47	\$59,640,712.21	\$59,917,647.66	\$352,223,603.18
Michigan	\$54,012,666.13	\$49,035,369.82	\$31,070,707.99	\$37,567,149.31	\$36,424,129.84	\$208,110,023.09
Missouri	\$155,425,916.22	\$154,771,112.39	\$133,830,068.98	\$125,058,442.41	\$161,404,421.19	\$730,489,961.19
New Jersey	\$29,781,731	\$33,642,555	\$18,103,605	\$14,349,538	\$18,184,700	\$114,062,129
New York	-	-	\$14,254,910	\$18,208,240	\$22,352,939	\$54,816,089
North Dakota	\$22,673,009.34	\$20,051,599.10	\$21,941,977.01	\$20,625,251.37	\$20,685,410.62	\$105,977,247.44
Oregon	\$165,049,886	\$157,050,522	\$126,573,973	\$109,062,318	\$124,730,508	\$682,467,207
Pennsylvania	\$535,761,116	\$527,435,576	\$368,781,615	\$430,018,639	\$430,108,642	\$2,292,105,588
Rhode Island	\$12,191,153	\$12,051,010	\$9,484,146	\$10,312,225	\$11,773,674.00	\$55,812,208
South Carolina	\$118,180,096.92	\$118,352,624.17	\$93,936,524.58	\$91,628,939.08	\$114,551,942.11	\$536,650,126.86
South Dakota	\$27,289,458.59	\$25,556,985.75	\$23,420,545.42	\$25,425,965.13	\$24,281,593.89	\$125,974,548.78
Utah	\$60,187,797.24	\$60,477,350.16	\$49,986,872.91	\$71,152,637.88	\$302,488,866.17	\$544,293,524.36
Vermont	-	-	-	\$5,418,255.45	\$5,225,093.77	\$10,643,349.22
Virginia	\$379,692,280.57	\$398,834,501.69	\$324,767,557.65	\$196,408,134.03	\$192,370,826.59	\$1,492,073,300.53
West Virginia	\$20,417,906	\$16,801,399	\$17,390,587	\$16,446,863	\$17,453,284	\$88,510,039
Wyoming	-	\$14,101,170.77	\$13,993,609.20	\$14,139,809.34	\$13,290,549.61	\$55,525,138.92

Appendix B: Fees Assessments

This table provides data from nine state judicial offices, showing the disaggregated amounts of fines and fees imposed by each state. The data is organized by fiscal year and includes the percentage of total impositions attributed to fees. Two states, New Jersey and New York, reported their court-imposed fines and fees data by calendar year.

State	Year	Fines Assessed	Fees Assessed	Total Assessed	Fee Percentage
Alaska	FY 18	\$19,043,636	\$5,979,874	\$25,023,510	23.90%
Alaska	FY 19	\$19,684,503	\$6,461,715	\$26,146,218	24.71%
Alaska	FY 20	\$18,017,158	\$8,177,776	\$26,194,934	31.22%
Alaska	FY 21	\$14,753,889	\$6,592,333	\$21,346,222	30.88%
Alaska	FY 22	\$17,381,404	\$7,672,129	\$25,053,533	30.62%
Arkansas	FY 18	\$26,994,446	\$28,629,240	\$55,623,685	51.47%
Arkansas	FY 19	\$30,744,755	\$35,053,944	\$65,798,698	53.27%
Arkansas	FY 20	\$26,592,290	\$27,764,282	\$54,356,572	51.08%
Arkansas	FY 21	\$28,116,622	\$27,044,541	\$55,161,163	49.03%
Arkansas	FY 22	\$27,998,140	\$24,647,474	\$52,645,614	46.82%
Colorado	FY 18	\$37,290,763	\$84,553,131	\$121,843,894	69.39%
Colorado	FY 19	\$37,812,215	\$85,554,938	\$123,367,154	69.35%
Colorado	FY 20	\$33,215,412	\$69,230,420	\$102,445,832	67.58%
Colorado	FY 21	\$23,404,745	\$56,307,981	\$79,712,726	70.64%
Colorado	FY 22	\$24,265,612	\$60,849,449	\$85,115,060	71.49%
Florida	FY 18	\$701,389,283	\$138,018,397	\$839,407,680	16.44%
Florida	FY 19	\$735,387,100	\$144,713,988	\$880,101,088	16.44%
Florida	FY 20	\$508,447,166	\$98,058,957	\$606,506,123	16.17%
Florida	FY 21	\$582,402,913	\$126,962,050	\$709,364,963	17.90%
Florida	FY 22	\$659,040,526	\$69,706,797	\$728,747,323	9.57%

Appendix B: Fees Assessments Continued

State	Year	Fines Assessed	Fees Assessed	Total Assessed	Fee Percentage
Idaho	FY 18	\$10,423,175	\$27,125,760	\$37,548,935	72.24%
Idaho	FY 19	\$18,647,274	\$45,137,184	\$63,784,458	70.77%
Idaho	FY 20	\$18,336,339	\$43,354,646	\$61,690,985	70.28%
Idaho	FY 21	\$18,350,683	\$41,775,898	\$60,126,581	69.48%
Idaho	FY 22	\$17,821,504	\$41,316,403	\$59,137,907	69.86%
New Jersey	FY 18	\$26,213,596	\$3,568,135	\$29,781,731	11.98%
New Jersey	FY 19	\$29,792,534	\$3,850,021	\$33,642,555	11.44%
New Jersey	FY 20	\$16,113,115	\$1,990,490	\$18,103,605	10.99%
New Jersey	FY 21	\$12,561,043	\$1,788,495	\$14,349,538	12.46%
New Jersey	FY 22	\$15,875,955	\$2,308,745	\$18,184,700	12.70%
Pennsylvania	FY 18	\$146,720,824	\$389,040,292	\$535,761,116	72.61%
Pennsylvania	FY 19	\$144,970,357	\$382,465,219	\$527,435,576	72.51%
Pennsylvania	FY 20	\$100,171,164	\$268,610,451	\$368,781,615	72.84%
Pennsylvania	FY 21	\$117,999,549	\$312,019,090	\$430,018,639	72.56%
Pennsylvania	FY 22	\$119,262,159	\$310,846,483	\$430,108,642	72.27%
South Carolina	FY 18	\$43,327,584	\$74,852,512	\$118,180,097	63.34%
South Carolina	FY 19	\$43,456,225	\$74,896,399	\$118,352,624	63.28%
South Carolina	FY 20	\$34,620,685	\$59,315,840	\$93,936,525	63.14%
South Carolina	FY 21	\$34,160,561	\$57,468,378	\$91,628,939	62.72%
South Carolina	FY 22	\$42,941,690	\$71,610,252	\$114,551,942	62.51%
Utah	FY 18	\$45,475,822	\$14,711,975	\$60,187,797	24.44%
Utah	FY 19	\$46,907,197	\$13,570,153	\$60,477,350	22.44%
Utah	FY 20	\$38,682,905	\$11,303,968	\$49,986,873	22.61%
Utah	FY 21	\$58,315,788	\$12,836,850	\$71,152,638	18.04%
Utah	FY 22	\$71,514,332	\$230,974,534	\$302,488,866	76.36%
Sum	FY18-FY22	\$4,844,644,639	\$3,608,717,588	\$8,453,362,227	42.69%

Appendix C: Caseloads

The Court Statistics Project (CSP), a joint initiative of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA), publishes caseload data sourced directly from the offices of state court administrators. This table includes the available incoming caseload data for the states that provided FFJC with court-imposed fines and fees data.

The caseloads include traffic violations, parking violations, ordinance violations, juvenile delinquency offenses, and criminal offenses—the same universe of court cases for which we requested fines and fees imposition data.

State	SUM of 2018	SUM of 2019	SUM of 2020	SUM of 2021	SUM of 2022
Alaska	82,020	87,887	81,028	73,240	63,884
Arkansas	63,714	63,980	500,929	558,139	56,163
Colorado	448,561	442,163	400,006	349,608	334,469
Florida	2,425,361	2,256,189	1,527,953	2,298,294	1,882,817
Idaho	278,955	267,160	238,322	239,964	229,344
Iowa	547,987	543,388	444,976	484,019	482,335
Kansas	570,053	-	-	-	-
Maine	139,612	121,487	88,834	85,627	88,618
Maryland	794,091	826,040	659,786	597,940	557,403
Michigan	2,510,229	2,461,747	1,663,164	1,854,093	2,168,319
Missouri	1,456,452	3,353,622	854,935	756,740	892,749
New Jersey	6,229,333	6,367,455	4,218,221	5,009,386	5,358,576
New York	1,111,954	936,555	633,617	753,403	886,100
North Dakota	143,483	136,081	142,121	146,843	132,898
Oregon	574,587	517,087	308,799	336,972	321,555
Pennsylvania	3,965,004	2,641,208	1,705,299	2,147,799	2,232,852
Rhode Island	128,618	124,238	89,818	114,583	113,342
South Carolina	866,800	1,099,520	769,735	711,751	795,797
South Dakota	146,021	156,989	147,471	10,047	11,688
Utah	461,212	478,078	535,312	509,032	466,483
Vermont	123,779	117,001	86,614	59,863	70,439
Virginia	1,242,680	1,325,103	806,427	855,252	915
West Virginia	43,106	41,838	143,106	153,392	11,331

Appendix D: Sources of Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Revenue Deposited into State General Funds

FFJC sought data from the fiscal office responsible for monitoring state general fund revenue forecasts in each U.S. state and the District of Columbia. The records requests sought information on revenue from court-imposed fines and fees that was deposited into the state's general fund for each fiscal year (FY) between FY2018 and FY2022. 26 states provided the requested revenue data for some of or all five fiscal years. However, only 21 of those states provided data for all 5 years, which is the full scope of this report's investigation.

For each of the five fiscal years (FY22, FY21, FY20, FY19, and FY18) FFJC requested fiscal offices to provide the following:

- For each state fine or fee revenue stream where [fiscal office] has taken into account some level

of uncollectible debt in its statewide revenue projections, please provide the dollar value, percentage of total revenue, or policy, formulas, or official assumptions used to calculate the portion of the fine or fee revenue that is assumed uncollectible;

- The amount of revenue from criminal or traffic court fines and fees that is included in the General Fund budget forecast. Please provide this as a number or percent of all General Fund dollars for the [state name] budget, separate from any forfeitures or fees imposed outside of the criminal or traffic system (i.e., we are not seeking civil fee information, such as child support);

This table outlines the details of the data obtained from each office that provided FFJC with full data.

State	Responsive Data Universe	Source	Responding Agency
Alabama	Includes Circuit/Family Court Fines (presumably not disaggregated by civil/criminal)	Alabama General Fund Annual Forecast	Did not submit records request due to state residency requirements; instead, took data from a report on the state's Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office website.
Colorado	Includes Court/Traffic-related Line Items from Judiciary Collections, including: Misc. Criminal Costs, Forfeitures, and Related Costs; Misc. Fees/Revenue; Public Defender Fees, Victims Assistance Fees	Colorado Judicial Branch Annual Statistical Reports, Table 40 (Collections Report)	Governor's Office of State Planning & Budgeting
Delaware	Includes all court-generated fees, costs, and fines (not disaggregated by civil/criminal)	Annual Reports of the Delaware Judiciary, p. 15, table labeled "Court Generated Revenue-Submitted to the State General Fund"	Department of Finance (office sent back notice of not tracking or possessing the requested data, but we later found a public report from the Judiciary that contained sufficient data for our purposes)
Florida	Includes "Article V fees & transfers": described in email from Florida Clerks of Court Operations Corporation (CCOC) staff as "good yardstick for criminal/traffic fees and service charges"	Florida Annual Legislative Fiscal Analysis In Brief, Chart 9	Clerks of Court Operations Corporation

State	Responsive Data Universe	Source	Responding Agency
Georgia	Includes court fees/costs, but not fines. Primary drivers of revenue include: district justice costs, fees/costs into the Indigent Defense Fund, and fees imposed on all criminal and traffic fine cases that go into Peace Officer and Prosecutor Training Fund.	Georgia Annual Revenue and Reserves Report, p. 10-14	Governor's Office of Planning and Budget
Idaho	Includes aggregated "court fines and fees" revenue line item (not disaggregated by civil/criminal)	Idaho General Fund Revenue Book , FY2024 and FY2021	Legislative Services Office, Budget & Policy Analysis Division
Illinois	Includes circuit court fines, penalties, assessments and forfeitures; annual report indicates that revenues are primarily criminal, traffic, conservation, and ordinance violation cases	Data received from Illinois Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request. Response based on tables in annual Illinois Court Statistical Summaries .	Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability
Minnesota	Includes fines & court fees that are remitted to MMB and sent to the General Fund, as identified by the budget office. We manually selected fines/fees detail lines to exclude from the total to best approximate universe of criminal & traffic fines & fees. Most significant revenue contributors include: Court Fines, General K/T Surcharge, Parking and Speeding Surcharge, Public Defender Copayment.	Data received from Minnesota Management & Budget following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Minnesota Management & Budget
Missouri	Includes all Court Fees, as defined from the responding office. Presumably is not disaggregated from forfeitures or fees outside of the criminal or traffic system	Data received from Missouri Division of Budget and Planning following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Office of Administration, Division of Budget & Planning

State	Responsive Data Universe	Source	Responding Agency
Montana	Includes general fund revenue line items most relevant to our report: District Court Fees; Court Surcharge; Highway Patrol Fines	Montana Legislative Fiscal Report, 2025 Biennium, Volume 2 – Revenue Estimates, p. 208 (for District Court Fees and Court Surcharge) Governor's Budget Fiscal Years 2024 – 2025 , p. 9-4 (for Highway Patrol Fines)	Montana Department of Revenue
Nevada	Includes Court Administrative Assessment (described in FOIA response from NV Fiscal Analysis Division as the only court fines or fees revenue that goes into the general fund.)	Nevada Economic Forum Forecasts (pdfs provided in FOIA response)	Legislative Counsel Bureau, Fiscal Analysis Division
New Jersey	Includes total Judiciary court fees (assumed civil + criminal) + public defender client receipts (repealed in 2023 so doesn't show up in the trend between 2018-2022.)	New Jersey Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) , General Fund table (usually around p. 335)	Department of the Treasury, Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
North Carolina	Includes line item called "judicial fees"; presumably no disaggregation between civil & criminal	North Carolina General Fund Monthly Reports (June of each year; see p. 8 of each report)	Office of State Budget & Management
North Dakota	Response defines revenues as "criminal fees and traffic fines"	Data received from North Dakota Management & Budget Office following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Management & Budget Office

State	Responsive Data Universe	Source	Responding Agency
Oregon	Includes state court fees (variety of civil & criminal fees, incl. parking) + criminal fines.	Data received from Oregon Department of Administrative Services following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Department of Administrative Services
Pennsylvania	District Justice Costs; Domestic Violence & Rape Crisis Program Fee; Supreme Court Revenue; Vehicle Code Fines	PA Annual Executive Budget Book, C1-27	Office of the Budget
Rhode Island	Includes Judiciary fines, fees and penalties (including traffic violation costs.) Excludes fees that were noted to be primarily from civil cases. Includes probation & parole because they are explicitly assessed by the courts.	Data received from Rhode Island Office of Revenue Analysis following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Office of Revenue Analysis
South Carolina	Includes Assessments, Fees, and Fines. Revenue line items are detailed, so we excluded lines that indicate civil cases or forfeitures. Some civil & family court revenue may be included in court assessment revenue lines.=	SC State Treasurer's Office Court Revenue Distribution to Agencies by Fines, Fees & Assessments	SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office
Tennessee	Fines, Fees & Revenues Categorized under "Arrests, Fines & Fees" in "Safety" Programmatic Category. No other revenue line item labeled as court or judiciary-related, so we made the assumption that court fines & fees are included in this safety line. Presumably includes both civil & criminal.	Data received from Tennessee State Budget Office following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Department of Finance & Administration

State	Responsive Data Universe	Source	Responding Agency
Texas	Revenue from criminal or traffic court fines and fees (as defined and aggregated by Comptroller; aggregate total only provided.)	Data received from Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts following public records request and on file with the authors; data is available upon request.	Comptroller of Public Accounts
Washington	Described in report as surcharges on certain fees, fines, and infraction penalties collected by the Washington court system (no way to disaggregate revenue line further)	<u>WA Quarterly Economic & Revenue Forecast Publication</u>	Economic & Revenue Forecast Council

Appendix E: Sources of Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Revenue Deposited into Local General Funds

This table summarizes the source and type of data included in our analysis of fine and fee revenue sent to the General Fund for the five local jurisdiction general fund case studies used in this report.

Local Jurisdiction	Data Universe	Source
Philadelphia, PA	Revenue lines include: Court Costs; Traffic Court Fines; Other Fines.	<u>Annual Budget documents, FY2018-FY2023 (Locally Generated Non-Tax Revenues Table)</u>
Colorado Springs, CO	Revenue lines include: Court costs; warrant costs; payment plan fee; General Violations; Violation Surcharge; and Traffic Violations. (There were no listed revenue lines for fees that would clearly fit within our desired data universe.)	<u>Annual Budget Documents, FY2018-FY2023</u>
DeKalb County, GA	Manually selected general fund totals from City Clerk Fines and Municipal Court Fines. Individual revenue lines include: State Court Traffic Division Fines and Forfeitures (also includes state-mandated surcharges, often 35% or more of the fine); and Recorders Court/State Court Fines and Forfeitures.	<u>Annual Budget Documents(Description of Tax Fund Items)</u>
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	All general fund fines, defined in the annual budget as “comprised of various fines and court fees that are processed by the City’s Municipal Court. The City is one of two municipalities in the State of Oklahoma that has a Municipal Court of Record. The two largest revenue sources in this category are court cost fees and traffic fines.	<u>Annual Budget Books, FY2020 - FY2024 (General Fund Summary Chart)</u>
St. Louis (City), MO	Judicial Office Fines & Fees as reported by Annual Revenue Estimate, including from: Circuit Clerk, Circuit Court, Circuit Attorney, and City Courts. City court bond judgements and juvenile fees are excluded as these are outside the scope of this study.	Budget Division <u>Annual Revenue Estimates, FY2020-FY2024</u>

Appendix F: Total Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Revenue Deposited into State General Funds, FY2018-FY2022

This table reports on the amount of fines and fees revenue that is deposited into each state's general fund annually, as reported by state fiscal offices and/or public government fiscal documents.

State	FY18 Actuals	FY19 Actuals	FY20 Actuals	FY21 Actual	FY22 Actuals
Alabama	\$7,351,527	\$6,745,763	\$5,731,715	\$5,366,354	\$6,089,254
Colorado	\$4,204,509	\$4,100,204	\$4,068,616	\$3,544,451	\$2,362,722
Delaware	\$12,639,435	\$11,675,228	\$10,121,442	\$8,464,033	\$8,847,525
Florida	\$113,000,000	\$108,000,000	\$101,100,000	\$106,100,000	\$121,100,000
Georgia	\$74,153,754	\$74,735,840	\$68,077,736	\$57,258,631	\$60,233,217
Idaho	\$9,183,950	\$8,212,984	\$7,156,326	\$6,978,544	\$7,077,107
Illinois	\$7,670,000	\$7,320,000	\$4,930,000	\$2,770,000	\$1,560,000
Minnesota	\$62,557,000	\$61,017,000	\$55,301,000	\$48,630,000	\$60,240,000
Missouri	\$11,679,464	\$11,318,159	\$10,489,737	\$10,059,103	\$10,735,103
Montana	\$8,714,000	\$8,483,000	\$8,059,000	\$8,487,000	\$8,583,000
Nevada	\$3,647,926	\$3,816,552	\$1,831,501	\$1,582,424	\$1,419,507
New Jersey	\$52,503,226	\$50,771,240	\$43,771,442	\$42,442,872	\$40,766,044
North Carolina	\$239,700,000	\$231,300,000	\$203,300,000	\$178,600,000	\$207,700,000
North Dakota	\$5,824,432	\$6,003,489	\$5,177,529	\$5,920,454	\$5,802,728
Oregon	\$79,044,241	\$83,233,419	\$83,451,477	\$58,233,170	\$53,279,544
Pennsylvania	\$70,360,000	\$71,231,000	\$67,131,000	\$58,348,000	\$59,672,000
Rhode Island	\$10,969,837	\$9,931,247	\$8,494,657	\$8,771,936	\$9,477,692
South Carolina	\$5,444,326	\$5,135,608	\$4,530,577	\$4,049,667	\$4,980,405
Tennessee	\$8,658,600	\$9,091,200	\$7,011,700	\$5,687,600	\$7,141,800
Texas	\$271,325,049	\$271,091,415	\$244,035,134	\$233,553,756	\$246,872,022
Washington	\$75,632,733	\$73,472,109	\$62,484,894	\$55,560,981	\$42,661,776

Appendix G: Annual Percentage Change in Court-Imposed Fines and Fees Revenue Deposited into State General Funds, FY2018-FY2022

This table shows the change in fines and fees sent to each state's general fund compared to the previous year, as well as the total percent change in this revenue from FY2018 to FY2022. These percentages are calculated based on the total revenue dollars reported in Appendix F.

State	FY2018-FY2019	FY2019-FY2020	FY2020-FY2021	FY2021-FY2022	5-year Trend
Alabama	-8%	-15%	-6%	13%	-17%
Colorado	-2%	-1%	-13%	-33%	-44%
Delaware	-8%	-13%	-16%	5%	-30%
Florida	-4%	-6%	5%	14%	7%
Georgia	1%	-9%	-16%	5%	-19%
Idaho	-11%	-13%	-2%	1%	-23%
Illinois	-5%	-33%	-44%	-44%	-80%
Minnesota	-2%	-9%	-12%	24%	-4%
Missouri	-3%	-7%	-4%	7%	-8%
Montana	-3%	-5%	5%	1%	-2%
Nevada	5%	-52%	-14%	-10%	-61%
New Jersey	-3%	-14%	-3%	-4%	-22%
North Carolina	-4%	-12%	-12%	16%	-13%
North Dakota	3%	-14%	14%	-2%	0%
Oregon	5%	0%	-30%	-9%	-33%
Pennsylvania	1%	-6%	-13%	2%	-15%
Rhode Island	-9%	-14%	3%	8%	-14%
South Carolina	-6%	-12%	-11%	23%	-9%
Tennessee	5%	-23%	-19%	26%	-18%
Texas	0%	-10%	-4%	6%	-9%
Washington	-3%	-15%	-11%	-23%	-44%

Appendix H: State By State Data from Judicial Offices on Court-Imposed Fines and Fees

The Fines and Fees Justice Center requested data representing statewide court fines and fees assessment for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal code violation cases between FY 2018 and FY 2022 from every state's and the District of Columbia's judicial office. States that provided imposition data for all requested fiscal years and across all offense categories are classified as having submitted full data. States classified as providing partial data either did not supply all five years of data or only reported impositions for certain offense categories. Although Texas did not directly provide imposition data, it is categorized as partial because FFJC identified publicly available data on its collection amounts for fines and fees. **Twelve** states provided data for all of the offense categories queried for each fiscal year, **13** states provided information for only some of the case types requested or only some of the requested years, and **25** states and D.C. did not provide data at all.

FFJC submitted the following standardized request to each state judicial office seeking records, documents, or data for FY22, FY21, FY20, FY19, and FY18 regarding:

- “The amount of unpaid fines and fees by fiscal year. If possible, please disaggregate by felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violation;
- The amount of fines and fees assessed by fiscal year: If possible, please disaggregate by felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violation;
- The collection rates resulting from fine and fee assessments, by fiscal year. If possible, please disaggregate by felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violation;
- For each fine or fee revenue stream where state judicial budgets have taken into account some level of uncollectible debt in the budget projections, please provide the dollar value, percentage of total revenue, or policy, formulas, or official assumptions used to calculate the portion of the fine or fee revenue that is assumed uncollectible; The amount of revenue from criminal court fines and fees that is included in the budgeted forecast for all state courts. Please provide this as a dollar number, or percent of all revenue budgeted for the state courts, separate from any forfeitures or fees imposed outside of the criminal or traffic system (i.e., we are not seeking civil fee information, such as child support)”

What follows is a state-by-state accounting of the information received in response to our public record requests.

Alabama

Did Not Receive Data

The Alabama Administrative Office of Courts responded that a moratorium on data projects ordered by the Alabama Administrative Director of the Courts was in effect at the time the request was submitted and would “remain in effect for the foreseeable future.” By the time this analysis was conducted, that moratorium on providing data had not been lifted.

Alaska**Received Full Data**

The Administrative Office of the Alaska Court System provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, and minor offenses. Alaska classifies most traffic offenses as criminal, and its administrative office did not separate traffic offenses from other misdemeanors in the data. Therefore, we assume that misdemeanor offenses in the dataset include traffic offenses. The assessment figures the Court provided represented a combination of the following: fines, cost of counsel, cost of imprisonment, jail surcharge, therapeutic court fee, collection costs, default judgment court cost, police and training surcharge, default judgment surcharge, and suspended imposition of sentence/suspended entry of judgment fine.

Beyond supplying the raw data, the administrative office provided helpful context for some outliers, such as a single \$2 million fee from a single criminal prosecution of a corporation or anomalies in reporting from certain agencies that may have skewed particular numbers.

Arizona**Did Not Receive Data**

The Arizona Judicial Branch's Research & Statistics Team reported that they do not capture data on assessments/fines.

Arkansas**Received Full Data**

The Arkansas Administrative Office of Courts provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal violation cases. This figure represented an extensive list of costs including the following, although not the extensive list: administration fee, jail fine, bailiffs fine, credit card fee, specialty court user fee, certified mail fee, court technology fee, crime stopper fee, collecting of installment fee, community service probation fee, jail housing fee, public defender fee, sheriff's office booking fee, and safe harbor fine.

California**Did Not Receive Data**

The Judicial Council of California, responded they did not have disclosable responsive records.

Colorado**Received Partial Data**

The Research and Data Unit of the State Court Administrator's Office provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, and traffic violations. Municipal violations cases were not included. Case counts only include those with financial assessments and do not include cases where a waiver of fines & fees was granted. Municipal cases were not included, as the state court system does not have this information.

The Fines and Fees Justice Center had to pay \$600 for the total time required for the State Court Administrator's Office to assemble records for our public records request at a \$30 per hour rate.

Connecticut**Did Not Receive Data**

The Performance Management, Quality Assurance & Judicial Branch Statistics Unit within the Superior Court Operations Division of the Connecticut Judicial Branch reported they do not have the data points requested in their current computer system and could not fulfill the data request.

Delaware**Did Not Receive Data**

Delaware's Administrative Office of the Courts provided the total balance of fines and fees owed to Delaware Courts as of November 30, 2023, and did not provide assessment data.

District of Columbia**Did Not Receive Data**

The Administrative Services Division of the District of Columbia Courts reported they were unable to provide assessment data.

Florida**Received Partial Data**

The Florida Court of Clerks and Comptrollers maintains annual reports on Assessments and Collections on fclerks.com, which includes data on traffic, misdemeanor, and felony cases. While Florida Clerks publicly provide data on county civil, circuit civil, and county criminal cases, they do not separately report municipal case data. As a result, the amount of fines and fees imposed for municipal violations cannot be determined from the available data. Municipal cases are maintained at the individual county level, therefore, FFJC did not submit a statewide records request for this data.

Georgia**Did Not Receive Data**

The Office of Research and Data Analysis at the Administrative Office of the Courts reported that it does not collect data on court fines and fees.

Hawaii**Did Not Receive Data**

The Hawai'i State Judiciary reported they did not have the resources to work on data requests at the time our request was submitted.

Idaho**Received Partial Data**

The Administrative Office of the Courts directed FFJC to the Idaho Court Financial Data Dashboard, which reports the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, and infraction offenses. Traffic cases were not included.

Illinois**Did Not Receive Data**

The Administrative Office of Illinois Courts responded they did not have statewide data related to our request.

Indiana**Did Not Receive Data**

The Indiana Office of Court Services reported our request for data was denied by the Executive Director of the Office of Court Services, without further explanation or context.

Iowa**Received Full Data**

The Iowa Judicial Branch provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, municipal ordinances, and traffic violations.

The Fines and Fees Justice Center paid \$360 for the total time required for the Judicial Branch to assemble records for our public records request, at a \$60 per hour rate.

Kansas**Received Full Data**

The Office of Judicial Administration of the Kansas Judicial Center provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations.

Kentucky**Did Not Receive Data**

The Administrative Office of the Courts stated that the records requested constitute “compiled information” and not “administrative records” of the AOC, as each is defined by the AOC Open Records Policy. As a result, FFJC’s request is not subject to public access under the AOC Open Records Policy and was denied.

Louisiana**Did Not Receive Data**

The Louisiana Supreme Court reported they are not the custodian of the requested records and that the courts in Louisiana that have original jurisdiction over felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations maintain the court’s records of fines and fees. Any request for such data would need to be made at each individual court.

Maine**Received Full Data**

The Administrative Office of the Courts of the State of Maine Judicial Branch provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal violations.

Maryland**Received Full Data**

The Maryland Judiciary provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations.

Massachusetts**Did Not Receive Data**

The Trial Court of Massachusetts is exempt from public disclosure and reported that most of the records we requested are bulk data, which is not authorized by Trial Court Rule XIV: Uniform Rules on Public Access to Court Records, Rule 4. They ultimately declined to provide any data.

Michigan**Received Partial Data**

Public reporting from the Michigan State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) provided partial data on a specific subset of fees related to trial costs, that are authorized pursuant to [*Mich. Comp. Laws § 769.1k\(1\)\(B\)\(iii\)*](#). A further public record request to the SCAO for broader data was acknowledged, with an official stating that they were in the process of expanding the state's unified case management system for state courts and that they would look into our request. Later follow-up requests for a status update went unanswered.

Minnesota**Did Not Receive Data**

The Minnesota Judicial Branch reported they did not have the resources or technical capacity to produce the requested information.

Mississippi**Did Not Receive Data**

The Administrative Office of Courts reported that they do not collect data regarding fines and fees paid and unpaid, collection rates, or any of the other requested data, stating that “this information would be contained in individual court records in the Municipal, Justice, County, and Circuit Courts and financial records of the State Department of Finance and Administration.”

Missouri**Received Full Data**

The Missouri Judiciary's Office of the State Courts Administrator provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations.

Montana**Did Not Receive Data**

The Montana Supreme Court reported its court did not levy fees for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, or municipal ordinances and remained silent on impositions from Montana's District and Courts of Limited Jurisdiction. Requests for such data would need to be made at each individual court.

Nebraska**Did Not Receive Data**

Nebraska's Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation responded that providing the requested information would be a very large undertaking for which they do not have the resources to complete.

Nevada**Did Not Receive Data**

The Records Official for the Administrative Office of the Courts, Nevada Supreme Court reported they did not hold the records FFJC requested. They suggested FFJC contact the individual courts where the records may have been filed for specific case records given that Nevada has a non-unified court system and there is no one repository with each court's case records, sentencing information, assessment, collection rates, court, and county/city budgets, uncollected amounts, and debt.

New Hampshire**Did Not Receive Data**

The New Hampshire Judicial Branch attempted to meet our request but was “not able to confidently respond to [our] request.” However, the Judicial Branch estimated “for FY18-22, the total fines and fees imposed ranged between \$7.7 and \$11.4 million. This estimate includes fines and penalty assessments (see RSA 193-B), not default fees (see RSA 597:38-a).” FFJC opted not to include their estimated data in our report because of the Judicial Branch reported they “do not have comprehensive data in which [they] are confident on the total fines

and fees imposed per year.”

New Jersey**Received Partial Data**

The New Jersey Superior Court Clerk’s Office stated that court records are only available as maintained or indexed by the Judiciary, which does not organize records by specific charges or fines. Without specific case details like a docket number or party name, records cannot be located.

However, FFJC’s research team located a dashboard maintained by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (OAG), using data from the Administrative Office of the Court (AOC), which provided information on the total amount of court fines and fees assessed for felony, misdemeanor, and municipal ordinance violations. Traffic cases were not included. FFJC submitted a records request to the OAG for disaggregated data by monetary sanction and year.

New Mexico**Did Not Receive Data**

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) searched their records and reports and determined that they do not possess or maintain records responsive to our request.

New York**Received Partial Data**

The New York Office of Court Administration responded that they do not maintain any records containing our requested data and denied our request.

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) provided FFJC with all its fines, fees, and surcharge data for 2020-2022. This data covers misdemeanor, violation, and infraction convictions from New York City Criminal Courts and City and District Courts outside NYC. However, DCJS does not receive fines, fees, or surcharge data from Town and Village courts due to limitations in the court system’s data-sharing. The data does not include traffic tickets issued in New York City. As of February 2025, FFJC accessed additional data from the State Comptroller’s response to a separate public record request. This data reported on fines, fees, and surcharges from Town and Village courts, but does not appear to report on traffic tickets issued in New York City, making the data incomplete from a statewide lens.

North Carolina**Did Not Receive Data**

The North Carolina Administrative Office of Courts did not provide us with data, stating “the NCAOC does not have a record responsive to [the] request.”

North Dakota**Received Partial Data**

The North Dakota State Court Administrator provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and infractions. The Administrator noted that municipal court data is incomplete because only 15 of 81 municipal courts used a case management system that allowed for centralized reporting to the state.

Ohio**Did Not Receive Data**

The Supreme Court of Ohio did not provide FFJC with data, stating: “Ohio has a decentralized (non-unified) court system. As such, the Supreme Court of Ohio does not administer or oversee the collection of court fines and fees by the state’s local courts – that is the purview of each local court. Additionally, the Supreme Court does not collect such data from the state’s local courts.”

Oklahoma**Did Not Receive Data**

The Supreme Court of Oklahoma’s Administrative Office of the Courts did not provide FFJC with data, stating: “Such data compilations are not official records which are received or maintained by this office in the ordinary course of our operations. The AOC also does not have the resources necessary to create ad hoc reports or data compilations upon request, nor does our system capture all of the data necessary to provide the reports you are requesting. Finally, Oklahoma’s Municipal Court system operates separately from the Oklahoma District Courts such that the AOC has no information concerning municipal court case records or outcomes.”

Oregon**Received Partial Data**

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, and municipal ordinance violations. Traffic cases were not included.

The Fines and Fees Justice Center paid \$300.00 for the total time required for the Oregon Judicial Department’s professional IT staff time to develop some custom queries to get the information FFJC sought, at a \$75 per hour rate. OJD granted a 50 percent fee reduction after FFJC demonstrated that it met OJD’s Public Interest Threshold.

Pennsylvania**Received Full Data**

The Judicial System of Pennsylvania maintains a publicly available dashboard of “Collection Rates Over Time” on its website. It includes total court-ordered payments, payments made, payments owed, and payment percentages between 2014 and 2023 for Common Pleas Courts and Magisterial District Courts. From this source, FFJC was able to collect data for criminal, traffic, and non-traffic offenses between FY 2018 and FY2022, making a further records request unnecessary.

Rhode Island**Received Full Data**

The Rhode Island Supreme Court provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations.

South Carolina**Received Partial Data**

The South Carolina Judicial Branch's Court Administration provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony and misdemeanor offenses, which includes all traffic violations. The data provided did not include fines or fees from the state's municipal courts, each of which has jurisdiction over all ordinance violations in addition to any state offense so long as it is not punishable by fines of more than \$500 (or in some cases \$5,000).¹¹⁸

The Fines and Fees Justice Center paid \$ 450.00 for the 15 hours required for the Judicial Branch to pull and prepare the data that FFJC ultimately received.

South Dakota**Received Full Data**

The South Dakota Unified Judicial System provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, and municipal ordinance violations. South Dakota classifies most traffic offenses as criminal, and its judicial system did not separate traffic offenses from other misdemeanors in the data. Therefore, we assume that misdemeanor offenses in the dataset include traffic offenses..

Tennessee**Did Not Receive Data**

Tennessee's Public Records Act, T.C.A. § 10-7-503, restricts the right to access public records to Tennessee residents. To make our request, one of FFJC's local partners submitted a public records request to Tennessee's Administrative Office of the Courts. The AOC did not respond to their request or follow-up email.

Texas**Received Partial Data**

The Texas Office of Court Administration reported it does not collect assessment data and stated that its "collections program was disbanded a few years ago and information that was previously collected is no longer collected." Requests for such data would need to be made at each individual court. However, FFJC's research team identified a publicly available report from the Texas State Comptroller of Public Accounts¹¹⁹ which includes Texas annual court costs collections from 1972 to 2022. Information from this report was included in our collections data analysis.

Utah**Received Full Data**

The Judicial Data & Research Office of Utah's Administrative Office of the Courts provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal violation cases.

The Fines and Fees Justice Center paid \$1,408.00 for the Judicial Data & Research Office to research, write, validate queries, and compile the information FFJC requested, at a \$32 per hour rate.

Vermont**Received Partial Data**

Vermont Judiciary's Office of the State Court Administrator provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, municipal, and traffic violations between FY 2021 and FY 2022, but was not able to provide data for FY 2018-2020.

Virginia**Received Full Data**

The Supreme Court of Virginia provided FFJC with the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violations.

Washington**Received No Data**

The Washington Administrative Office of the Courts estimated the total cost of FFJC's request to be between \$1,237 and \$1,584. However, after we requested an itemized breakdown of the cost for each part of our request, the AOC did not provide the cost requested breakdown, despite multiple followups, and ultimately did not provide any data.

West Virginia**Received Partial Data**

The Administrative Office of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed for misdemeanor offenses filed in state courts. For felony data, FFJC was directed to contact each county's circuit clerk, while municipal data inquiries were directed to individual municipalities.

Wisconsin**Did Not Receive Data**

The Supreme Court of Wisconsin stated that FFJC's request was for what it deemed to be "information" rather than "records" and communicated that the public records law does not require the Court to "respond to requests for information or answer questions about topics of interest to [FFJC]."

Wyoming**Received Partial Data**

The Wyoming Judicial Branch provided the total amount of fines and fees assessed by courts for felony, misdemeanor, and traffic violations between FY 2019 to FY 2022, the Judicial Branch was unable to provide data from FY 2018 and stated that it does not maintain data for municipalities.

Appendix I: Warrant Data

FFJC, as part of its public record request to state judicial offices, also requested that each provide the number of failure to pay and failure to appear warrants issued between FY 2018 and FY 2022. Only thirteen states provided bench warrant data: all thirteen provided failure to appear (FTA) warrant data, while only eight provided failure to pay (FTP) warrant data. Below is a detailed account of how each state responded specifically to our request for warrant data. States that denied our full request without explicitly addressing the warrant data are accounted for in Appendix H. FFJC sought records, documents, or data for FY22, FY21, FY20, FY19, and FY18 regarding:

- The total number of failure-to-pay bench warrants issued by fiscal year. If possible, please disaggregate by felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violation;
- The total number of failure-to-appear bench warrants issued by fiscal year. If possible, please disaggregate by felony, misdemeanor, traffic, and municipal ordinance violation.”

Alabama

The Alabama Administrative Office of Courts responded that a moratorium on data projects ordered by the Alabama Administrative Director of the Courts was in effect at the time the request was submitted and would “remain in effect for the foreseeable future.” By the time this analysis was conducted, that moratorium on providing data had not been lifted.

Alaska

The Alaska Administrative Office of the Courts did not provide FTP or FTA warrant data because their system does not capture the reason the warrant was issued.

Arizona

The Arizona Judicial Branch’s Research & Statistics Team did not acknowledge the part of the request regarding FTP and FTA bench warrants and did not provide any details.

Arkansas

The Arkansas Administrative Office of Courts did not acknowledge the part of the request regarding FTP and FTA bench warrants and did not provide any details.

California

The Judicial Council of California did not have disclosable responsive records regarding FTP and FTA warrants.

Colorado

The Research and Data Unit of the State Court Administrator’s Office provided the number of FTA Warrants by case class by fiscal year. The number of FTP warrants was not included because, since 2016, Colorado courts have not issued warrants for failure to pay, due to the passage of HB16-1311.

Connecticut

FTA warrant data was not included in the response from the state judiciary. However, FFJC identified warrant data through [quarterly reports](#) of Arrest Warrants from The Judicial Branch Statistics.

Delaware

Delaware’s Administrative Office of the Courts did not acknowledge the part of the request regarding FTP and FTA bench warrants and did not provide any details.

District of Columbia

The Administrative Services Division of the District of Columbia Courts reported they did not identify failure to pay bench warrants during the requested time period and did not acknowledge the part of the request regarding FTA bench warrants.

Florida

The Florida Court of Clerks and Comptrollers maintains publicly available annual reports on civil and criminal cases on flclerks.com. Data on FTP and FTA could not be obtained through this data collection process.

Georgia

The Office of Research and Data Analysis at the Administrative Office of the Courts reported that the AOC does not collect data on FTP and FTA warrants.

Hawaii

The Hawai'i State Judiciary reported they did not have the resources to work on data requests at the time our request was submitted and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Idaho

The Administrative Office of the Courts said it was unable to compile the requested statistics regarding FTP and FTA warrants.

Illinois

The Administrative Office of Illinois Courts responded they did not have statewide data related to our request and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Indiana

The Indiana Office of Court Services responded that our request for data was denied by the Executive Director of the Office of Court Services, and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Iowa

The Iowa Judicial Branch reported they were unable to provide FTP and FTA warrant data because there isn't a specific event code for the "failure to pay" or "failure to appear" bench warrants in the Iowa court information system.

Kansas

The Office of Judicial Administration denied our request for FTP and FTA warrant data, stating that fulfilling it would require thousands of case records to be individually searched, which is considered compiled records, which may not be disclosed pursuant to KSA 45-221(a)(1) and Kansas Supreme Court Rule 106B.

Kentucky

The Administrative Office of the Courts denied our request and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Louisiana

The Louisiana Supreme Court reported they are not the custodian of the requested records and that the courts in Louisiana that have original jurisdiction over bench warrants and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Maine

The Administrative Office of the Courts of the State of Maine Judicial Branch provided the requested data on FTP and FTA warrants issued by fiscal year.

Maryland

The Maryland Judiciary provided the number of FTP and FTA warrants issued per fiscal year. The courts disclosed that “failure to pay warrants may include warrants issued for a party’s failure to appear at a hearing.”

Massachusetts

The Trial Court of Massachusetts is exempt from public disclosure and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Michigan

The Michigan State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) acknowledged the revival of our request but did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Minnesota

The Minnesota Judicial Branch provided FFJC with the number of failure-to-appear bench warrants issued. The Minnesota court system reported it does not categorize bench warrants based on a failure to pay and could not provide that data.

Mississippi

The Administrative Office of Courts reported that they do not collect data regarding bench warrants issued for nonpayment, or any of the other requested data, and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Missouri

The Missouri Judiciary’s Office of the State Courts Administrator provided the number of FTP and FTA warrants issued for each fiscal year.

Montana

The Montana Supreme Court did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants and stated that such data would need to be made at each individual court.

Nebraska

Nebraska’s Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation responded that providing the requested information would be a very large undertaking for which they do not have the resources to complete and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Nevada

The Records Official for the Administrative Office of the Courts, Nevada Supreme Court reported they did not hold the records regarding FTP and FTA warrants and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants. They suggested FFJC contact the individual courts where the records may have been filed did not provide

New Hampshire

The New Hampshire Judicial Branch provided FTP and FTA bench warrant data by fiscal year from its Circuit Court.

New Jersey

The New Jersey Superior Court Clerk’s Office stated that court records are only available as maintained or indexed by the Judiciary, and without specific case details like a docket number or party name, records cannot be located. They did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

New Mexico

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) searched their records and reports and determined that they do not possess or maintain records responsive to our request and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

New York

The New York Office of Court Administration denied our request and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

North Carolina

The North Carolina Administrative Office of Courts reported it did not have records responsive to report on the number of FTP and FTA warrants issued.

North Dakota

The North Dakota State Court Administrator reported they were unable to provide FTP or FTA bench warrant data because they use only a generic “warrant issued” code that does not allow for that degree of specificity as to why the warrant was issued.

Ohio

The Supreme Court of Ohio stated the Supreme Court does not collect such data from the state’s local courts and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Oklahoma

The Supreme Court of Oklahoma’s Administrative Office of the Courts stated it “does not have the resources necessary to create ad hoc reports or data compilations upon request, nor does our system capture all of the data necessary to provide the reports you are requesting” and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Oregon

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) provided the number of FTA warrants issued for each fiscal year. The OJD did not have the capacity to identify the number of FTP warrants and stated the following: “OJD does not have a specific warrant type associated with warrants issued for failure to pay. These warrants would be issued as “bench,” “probation violation,” or “failure to comply” warrants. When bench, probation violation, or failure to comply warrants are issued, there are no data elements available to identify the specific reason for the warrant.”

Pennsylvania

The Judicial System of Pennsylvania maintains a publicly available dashboard of Fine and Fee data on its website. Data on FTP and FTA could not be obtained through the initial data collection process.

Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Supreme Court provided the number of FTA warrants issued for each fiscal year. They stated, “there were no further warrants issued after 2-28-2020 for FTA for an Ability to Pay.”

South Carolina

The South Carolina Judicial Branch’s Court Administration was unable to compile information regarding warrants and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

South Dakota

The South Dakota Unified Judicial System provided the number of FTP and FTA warrants issued for each fiscal year.

Tennessee

Tennessee's Public Records Act, T.C.A. § 10-7-503, restricts the right to access public records to Tennessee residents. To make our request, one of FFJC's local partners submitted a public records request to Tennessee's Administrative Office of the Courts. The AOC did not respond to their request or follow-up email and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Utah

The Judicial Data & Research Office of Utah's Administrative Office of the Courts provided FTP and FTA warrant data as requested.

Vermont

Vermont Judiciary's Office of the State Court Administrator provided FFJC with the number of FTA warrants for felony and misdemeanor offenses for FY2022. The Vermont Judiciary does not issue arrest warrants for failure to pay fees and fines.

Virginia

The Supreme Court of Virginia was unable to provide FTP and FTA warrant data because there are no distinguishing codes that would discern failure-to-pay and failure-to-appear from contempt-of-court violations from other contempt-of-court violations related to failure to abide by a court order in their case management system.

Washington

The Washington Administrative Office of the Courts did not respond to followup emails and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

West Virginia

The Administrative Office of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia reported "Magistrates do not issue bench warrants for failure to pay" and it is "impossible to generate a report demonstrating the number of bench warrants issued specifically for failure to appear." Consequently, the office provided no warrant data.

Wisconsin

The Supreme Court of Wisconsin denied FFJC's request and did not provide any details on FTP and FTA warrants.

Wyoming

The Judiciary provided the number of FTP and FTA warrants issued for each fiscal year between 2019 and 2022.

Appendix J

This table presents data detailing the number of bench warrants issued by state and fiscal year for the states FFJC was able to obtain data from.

STATE	Year	FTP Warrants	FTA Warrants
Colorado	FY2018	-	90,971
Colorado	FY2019	-	91,590
Colorado	FY2020	-	80,820
Colorado	FY2021	-	112,857
Colorado	FY2022	-	110,724
Connecticut	FY2018	-	22,756
Connecticut	FY2019	-	23,044
Connecticut	FY2020	-	16,696
Connecticut	FY2021	-	9,892
Connecticut	FY2022	-	24,575
Maine	FY2018	6,215	10,658
Maine	FY2019	50,563	10,576
Maine	FY2020	4,236	8,493
Maine	FY2021	27	9,706
Maine	FY2022	172	14,786
Maryland	FY2018	480	86,951
Maryland	FY2019	173	38,067
Maryland	FY2020	259	49,377
Maryland	FY2021	413	72,916
Maryland	FY2022	222	54,756
Minnesota	FY2018	-	73,338
Minnesota	FY2019	-	71,234
Minnesota	FY2020	-	57,130
Minnesota	FY2021	-	79,108
Minnesota	FY2022	-	82,398
Missouri	FY2018	2,479	112,826
Missouri	FY2019	2,560	115,895
Missouri	FY2020	1,049	117,246
Missouri	FY2021	384	138,253
Missouri	FY2022	809	215,286

New Hampshire	FY2018	2,000	9598
New Hampshire	FY2019	1,670	9208
New Hampshire	FY2020	1,226	7961
New Hampshire	FY2021	933	8691
New Hampshire	FY2022	861	11620
Oregon	FY2018	-	48,295
Oregon	FY2019	-	46,283
Oregon	FY2020	-	35,927
Oregon	FY2021	-	39,333
Oregon	FY2022	-	45,391
Rhode Island	FY2018	-	3,022
Rhode Island	FY2019	-	2,284
Rhode Island	FY2020	-	1,600
Rhode Island	FY2021	-	738
South Carolina	FY2018	4,509	6,567
South Carolina	FY2019	7,403	5,308
South Carolina	FY2020	5,259	4,597
South Carolina	FY2021	3,058	2,823
South Carolina	FY2022	2,565	5,448
South Dakota	FY2018	120	33,693
South Dakota	FY2019	152	30,569
South Dakota	FY2020	158	31,615
South Dakota	FY2021	100	30,241
South Dakota	FY2022	70	25,698
Utah	FY2018	394	,1726
Utah	FY2019	105	365
Utah	FY2020	95	342
Utah	FY2021	85	429
Utah	FY2022	82	415
Wyoming	FY2018	-	-
Wyoming	FY2019	2,663	2,166
Wyoming	FY2020	3,258	1,613
Wyoming	FY2021	3,397	1,571
Wyoming	FY2022	2,989	1,744
Total	FY2018-FY2024	113,083	2,460,167

Endnotes

- 1 Hayley Hahn, “Stripping the Gears of White Supremacy: A Call to Abate Reliance on Court Fines and Fees and Revitalize Local Taxation,” *Journal of Law and Political Economy* 2, no. 1 (2021): 29; Julie M. Lawhorn, *Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: A Historical Perspective on Contemporary Issues*, Congressional Research Service, R40638 (May 2019); Torie Atkinson, “A Fine Scheme: How Municipal Fines Become Crushing Debt in the Shadow of the New Debtors’ Prisons,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review (CR-CL)* 51, no. 1 (2016): 193.
- 2 Robert Greenstein, *Tax Cuts and Consequences: The States That Cut Taxes the Most During the 1990s Have Suffered Lately*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, (2005); Lisa Foster, “The Price of Justice: Fines, Fees and the Criminalization of Poverty in the United States,” *University of Miami Race & Social Justice Law Review*, 11:1, 3 (2020).
- 3 Hayley, *supra* note 1 at 26; Aravind Boddupalli & Livia Mucciolo, *Following the Money of Fines and Fees*, Urban Institute (2022).
- 4 Austin Aldag, Mildred Warner, & Yunjui Kim, “What Causes Local Fiscal Stress?,” Cornell University, New York Conference of Mayors and the New York State Association of Towns, 4 (2017).
- 5 See, e.g., Dept. of Justice Civil Rights Division, “Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department” U.S. Dept. of Justice (2015): 1-2; Dept. of Justice Civil Rights Division & U. S. Attorney’s Office for the S.D. of Mississippi, *Investigation of the Lexington Police Department and the City of Lexington, Mississippi*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, (September 2024); Rebecca Goldstein, Michael W. Sances, & Hye Young You, “Exploitative Revenues, Law Enforcement, and the Quality of Government Services,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 56(1), 5-31 (Original work published 2020) 1-27, 4-5 & 17 [hereinafter “Exploitative Revenues.”].
- 6 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Targeted Fines and Fees Against Low-Income Communities of Color: Civil Rights and Constitutional Implications* (2017), 3; Alabama Appleseed et al., *Under Pressure: How Fines and Fees Hurt People, Undermine Public Safety, and Drive Alabama’s Racial Wealth Divide* (2018), 4; Aravind Boddupalli et al., *How Fines and Fees Impact Family Well-Being*, Tax Policy Center (2024); Michael W. Sances & Hye Young You, “Who Pays for Government? Descriptive Representation and Exploitative Revenue Sources,” *The Journal of Politics* 79, no.3 (2017).
- 7 Fines and Fees Justice Center and The Wilson Center for Science and the Law, *Debt Sentence: How Fines and Fees Hurt Working Families* (2023),12 [hereinafter FFJC & Wilson Center, *Debt Sentence*].
- 8 Joni Hirsch & Priya S. Jones, “Driver’s License Suspension for Unpaid Fines and Fees: The Movement for Reform,” 54 *U. Mich. J. L. Reform* 875 (2021).
- 9 Caroline Greer & Vittorio Nastasi, Fines and fees: *Consequences and opportunities for Reform*, The Reason Foundation (2023), 1-2, <https://reason.org/policy-brief/fines-and-fees-consequences-and-opportunities-for-reform>.
- 10 United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, “Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department,” (2015), 2, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf.
- 11 Mike Maciag, “Fine and Fee Revenues: A Special Report,” *Governing* (published August 16, 2019) (last visited March 19, 2025).
- 12 Bryce Tuggle, *Fees, Fines, and Criminal Justice in Tennessee*, The Sycamore Institute (December 2020).
- 13 Briana Hammons, *Tip of the Iceberg: How Much Criminal Justice Debt Does the U.S. Really Have?*, Fines and Fees Justice Center (2021).
- 14 Paulina Maqueda Escamilla, *Unholy Alliance: California Courts’ Use of Private Debt Collectors*, California Reinvestment Coalition (May 2018).
- 15 The town of Brookside, Alabama, is under scrutiny for operating a justice system in which judges, prosecutors, and police officers are accused of financial conflicts of interest undermining due process as the officials’ financial incentives may distort their impartiality and decision-making in enforcing municipal codes. See “Statement of Interest of the United States” filed by the U.S. Department of Justice in *Coleman et al. v. Brookside et al.*, Case 2:22-cv-00423-RDP, N.D. Ala. (July 2022).

16 The City of Lexington, Mississippi, and its police department were found by the U.S. Department of Justice to have violated constitutional and federal rights by using aggressive and discriminatory policing practices to extract revenue from residents. Dept. of Justice *Investigation of the Lexington Police Department and the City of Lexington, Mississippi*, supra note 5.

17 Erica MacKellar, “Brief: FY 2022 State Budget Update,” National Conference of State Legislatures website (2022).

18 Julie Marie Baldwin, John Eassey, & Erica J. Brooke, “Court Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45, no. 4, (2020): 743-758.

19 S. Gibson, N. Waters, M. Hamilton, E. Stevens, M. Moffett, H. Caspers, E. Taylor, eds. “CSP STAT Traffic (Caseload Detail)” CSP STAT, National Center for State Courts (last updated October 2024) (last accessed March 19 2025).

20 Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, and Virginia.

21 Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, South Dakota, and Utah.

22 Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, and Virginia.

23 To determine this, FFJC used data between 2018 and 2022 from the Court Statistics Project (CSP), which publishes incoming caseload data sourced directly from the offices of state court administrators. S. Gibson, N. Waters, M. Hamilton, E. Stevens, M. Moffett, H. Caspers, E. Taylor, eds. “CSP STAT Overview” CSP STAT, National Center for State Courts (last updated October 2024) (last accessed March 19 2025).

24 Only 18 states provided five years of fine and fee data to compare with the CPS caseload numbers. Among those, only seven disaggregated their data sufficiently for us to separate offenses.

25 Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, and Oregon.

26 It is important to recognize that some individuals may have multiple cases, which could contribute to even higher per person amounts.

27 The 2023 average EITC was \$2,743. Internal Revenue Service, “[Statistics for tax returns with the Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#),” IRS website (last visited March 19, 2025)

28 Boddupall et al. at supra note 6.

29 Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2023*, United States Federal Reserve (2024).

30 Marea Beeman et al., *At What Cost? Findings from an Examination into the Imposition of Public Defense System Fees*, National Legal Aid and Defender Association (2022); “[A Journalists Guide to Federal Courts](#),” U.S. Federal Courts website (last visited March 19, 2025).

31 Alexi Jones & Wendy Sawyer, “[Arrest, Release, Repeat: How police and jails are misused to respond to social problems](#),” *Prison Policy Institute* (2019).

32 Devah Pager, et al., “Criminalizing Poverty: The Consequences of Court Fees in a Randomized Experiment,” *American Sociological Review* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224221075783>; Lindsay Bing et al, “The Long-Term Impact of Debt Relief for Indigent Defendants in a Misdemeanor Court.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* (July 2024) <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2415066121>.

33 Performance Improvement and Efficiency Committee, *2023 Performance Measures Report and Standards*, Florida Clerks of Courts Corporation website (last visited March 19, 2025) ; Don K. Murphy, “[Why Crime Doesn't Pay: Examining Felony Collections](#),” *Institute for Court Management* (2015).

34 Murphy, Id.

35 Across all 18 states for which we had total impositions to compare with disaggregated caseload data (i.e. data that did not allow us to separate criminal data from traffic or municipal data) the median fine and fee per case was approximately \$159.

36 U.S. Dept of Justice, “[Dear Colleague Letter to Courts Regarding Fines and Fees for Youth and Adults](#),” Civil Rights Division, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Access to Justice, 2 (April 2023).

37 It is important to note that the fees examined in this report are only those imposed by the court and the agencies it controls (which may or may not include probation, depending on the jurisdiction). Court-involved people, however, are often charged fees by other agencies – such as the department of correction, the sheriff, or the department of mental health – or by third-party service providers – such as clinicians, private electronic monitoring companies, towing companies, or others. All of these are revenue-making fees imposed in relation to the alleged offense, and may even be enforced by the court, but which are outside the scope of this report, and thus not reflected in this discussion.

38 In FY2021, Utah's Justice Courts imposed \$2.4 million in Plea in Abeyance fees for citations; however in FY2022, that amount grew to over \$218 million. For example, in Salt Lake City, a plea in abeyance fee to a traffic ticket is \$25. See [https://www.slc.gov/courts/traffic/traffic-school/#:~:text=A%20plea%20in%20abeyance%20fee%20of%20\\$25.00%20is%20assessed,,traffic%20school%20within%2060%20days](https://www.slc.gov/courts/traffic/traffic-school/#:~:text=A%20plea%20in%20abeyance%20fee%20of%20$25.00%20is%20assessed,,traffic%20school%20within%2060%20days).

39 See, e.g., Devah Pager, Rebecca Goldstein, & Bruce Western, “Criminalizing Poverty: The Consequences of Court Fees in a Randomized Experiment” *American Sociological Review*, Sage Journals (February 2022) (finding that fines and fees have no effect on recidivism); Michael Ostermann, Nathan Link, & Jordan Hyatt. “Reframing the debate on legal financial obligations and crime: How accruing monetary sanctions impacts recidivism,” *Criminology*, Vol. 62, Issue 2, 331-363 (May 2024) (finding that the burden of growing fines and fees over prolonged justice system entanglement makes recidivism more likely, not less). Even in the traffic context, research is mixed on the deterrent benefit of financial sanctions. See, e.g., Saranath Lawpoolsri, Jingyi Li & Elisa R. Braver (2007) “Do Speeding Tickets Reduce the Likelihood of Receiving Subsequent Speeding Tickets? A Longitudinal Study of Speeding Violators in Maryland,” *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 8:1, 26-34 (finding legal consequences had no significant effect on the risk of receiving a repeat speeding citation) compared with Rune Elvik, “Association between increase in fixed penalties and road safety outcomes: A meta-analysis,” *Accident Analysis & Prevention* (2016) (finding that a selection of previous studies showed a slight deterrent impact on traffic reoffending).

40 Karin D. Martin, “Predatory Fines and Fees: Revenue, Fiscal Contrition, and Policy Change,” *Law & Policy*, University of Denver, Vol. 45 - 4 (2023).

41 Julie Marie Baldwin, John M. Eassey, & Erika J. Brooke, “Court Operations during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 45, no. 4, 743-758 (2020).

42 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Chart Book: “Tracking the Recovery from the Pandemic Recession,” (online update April 3, 2024).

43 S. Gibson, et al. “Last Updates CSP STAT,” (2024) (using data as of 15 November 2024 for analysis).

44 The 18 states include: Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, and West Virginia

45 Goldstein et al., “Exploitative Revenue,” *supra* note 5.

46 Compare with Aravind Boddupalli, “Five Facts About Fines and Fees Revenues,” Tax Policy Center, Urban Institute & Brookings Institution (published online December 5, 2024) (finding that total fines and fees collected had remained about the same from FY2017-FY2022 but using U.S. Census Bureau data that included collections of more than just court-imposed fines and fees, including restitution collections, which are legally different from either fines or fees).

47 Sarah Picard et. al., “The Jefferson County Equitable Fines and Fees Project: Preliminary Findings on Fairness and Efficacy,” 3 (2024).

48 Pat Levy-Lavelle, “Can’t Afford An Attorney? Virginia Law Tells Poor People to Pay Anyway,” *Legal Aid Justice Center*, 5 (2024).

49 Jeffrey T. Ward, Nathan W. Link, & Andrew Christy. “Imposition and Collection of Fines, Costs, and Restitution in Pennsylvania Criminal Courts,” ACLU of Pennsylvania (December 24, 2020),

50 National Association of Attorneys General, “State Attorneys General Urge Congress to Stabilize Funding To Support Victims of Crime,” NAAG website (published online February 7, 2024).

51 David Ovalle, “Fewer Tickets in Florida May Mean Big Budget Cuts,” *The Miami Herald*, republished on WINK News / Fort Meyers Broadcasting, (February 13 2021).

52 David Ovalle, “Traffic Tickets Plunged in Florida. It May Mean Painful Budget Cuts for Many Services” The Miami Herald, republished on FLSkyNews.com (January 11 2021). 53 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “States Grappling with Hit To Tax Collections,” (last updated 2022, originally published 2020).

54 Fines and Fees Justice Center, “COVID-19 Crisis: FFJC Policy Recommendations and Policy Tracker,” (last updated October 2022).

55 National Association of State Budget Offices, “Summaries of State Actions,” published online at nasbo.org (March 2020).

56 U.S. Dept. of the Treasury, “State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds,” published online at treasury.org/policy-issues (as of October 2024).

57 MacKellar, *supra* note 17.

58 Lucy Dadayan, “State Tax Revenues Still Strong, But for How Long? State Tax and Economic Review, 2022 Quarter 1,” Tax Policy Center, Urban Institute (2022) (noting this growth was in large part driven by changes to California’s corporate tax policy, but still reflects the robust national rebound of corporate income tax.)

59 *Id.*

60 Boddupalli at *supra* note 6.

61 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Tracking the COVID-19 Economy’s Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships” (update published online February 2022).

62 We received usable data for Maryland, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Vermont, however, each of these dataset was incomplete, missing records for at least one year in the FY2018-FY2022 period. To avoid distorting year-over-year change trends, we excluded these states from our analysis. Additionally, although New Mexico provided us with data for all five years, significant questions about the context of the data remained unresolved despite communication with the responding office. As a result, we also excluded New Mexico from our analysis.

63 We reached this conclusion by comparing the data we received from states on fines and fees revenue deposited into state General Funds, to the total General Fund revenue reported in public budget documents for each state and year from FY2018-FY2022. Across all five years and all states for which we had data, the median percentage of the general fund that court fines and fees revenue comprised was only 0.2 percent.

64 We refer here to fines and fees instead of specifically criminal and traffic-related fines and fees because at least 13 of the 21 states with usable data presumably aggregated collections from both civil and criminal fines and fees.

65 We again used median as a metric here to avoid our findings being skewed by any outlier data. Of the 21 states included in our analysis, Florida and Illinois were the biggest outliers. Florida was the only state that saw an increase over the five-year period of court fines and fees deposited into the general fund; this may be because of Florida’s unique court funding structure but it warrants further research. Conversely, Illinois, reported an 80 percent decrease in court fines and fees deposited to the general fund over the five-year period, with significant decreases of between 32 and 44 percent reported in FY20, FY21, and FY22, indicating no sign of “recovery” in this revenue stream during the post-pandemic crisis period. This finding too warrants additional research, but the use of the median in our analysis ensures that these results do not skew our overall findings in this report.

66 A 2024 LendingTree survey reported that more than 1 in 3 US households had trouble paying for basic necessities like food or rent in the past week, a statistic that is up by 6.7 percent from 2022: <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/more-than-1-3-us-households-have-financial-insecurity-survey-2024>

67 The Rhode Island Controller’s Office, in response to our public records request, emailed a copy of “Summary of Allowance & Deferred Revenue,” which is on file with authors.

68 Florida Clerks of Court Operations Corporation, “Performance Measures Reports and Standards (for CFY2021-22)” (2021).

69 We did not find data on fines and fees deposited to local general funds to be common in publicly available local budget documents. Of the many cities and counties we searched, we found useful data in just five jurisdictions, which are listed in Table 6.

70 ArchCity Defenders, “In the Rearview Mirror: St. Louis’s Municipal Courts After a Decade of Reform and Regress” (July 2024).

71 Boddupall et al. at supra note 6; see also, FFJC & Wilson Center, *Debt Sentence*, supra note 7 (finding similarly egregious impacts on housing and other bills, though using a 10-year span, rather than just 2023 year).

72 Boddupall et al. at supra note 6.

73 Id.

74 *Bearden v. Georgia*, 461 U.S. 660 (1983).

75 See, e.g., *Beck v. Elmore County Magistrate Court*, 489 P.3d 820 (ID 2021) (holding that the U.S. Constitution requires a court to have probable cause that a person wilfully failed to pay before a judge may issue a bench warrant).

76 A. Fisbane et al., “Behavioral Nudges Reduce Failure to Appear for Court,” *Science*, Vol. 370, Issue 6517, 368; Shannon McAuliffe, et al., *National Guide for Improving Court Appearance*, Ideas42 (May 2023) (identifying research showing that inflexible work schedules, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and a lack of mental bandwidth for those struggling daily to survive in poverty can all create barriers to employment that may not be evident to judges or other court personnel who do not similarly struggle).

77 Oren Gur, *Shifting the Narrative: How Research Challenges Assumptions About Failure to Appear in Court, and the Need for More Data*, Fair and Just Prosecution (2025).

78 Fines and Fees Justice Center, *The Drive to Jail: Why States Should Decriminalize Minor Traffic Offenses and Stop Using Bench Warrants to Enforce Traffic Laws*, (December 2023, updated February 2024).

79 The Rhode Island Judiciary reported via email that as of February 2020, it stopped issuing FTA warrants if the underlying issue involved an inability to pay. Email on file with authors.

80 Maria Rafael, *Paying the Price: New Mexico’s Practice of Arresting and Incarcerating People for Nonpayment of Court Debt*, Vera Institute of Justice (February 2024) (Although New Mexico eliminated its \$100 bench warrant fee in 2023, bench warrants for FTP and FTA are still possible.)

81 Foster Kamanga et al., “Costs and Consequences of Traffic Fines and Fees: A Case Study of Open Warrants in Las Vegas, Nevada,” *Journal of Social Sciences* (November 2021).

82 Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming..

83 More precisely, 2,573,250 bench warrants were issued in these 13 states over the study period.

84 New Mexico’s population as of July 1, 2023 was estimated at 2,114,371. U.S. Census Bureau, *Quick Facts: New Mexico*, U.S. Dept. of Commerce (last visited March 20, 2025).

85 The eight states providing FTP bench warrant data were Maine, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. Other states, such as Colorado, clarified that they do not issue FTP warrants. Still others, such as Oregon, responded that failure to pay may be captured in other warrant types, but that the system did not specify the reason for the warrant.

86 Colorado Division of Motor Vehicles, “Tickets and Penalty Assessments,” Colorado Department of Revenue website (last visited February 21, 2025).

87 “Responding to your ticket,” Missouri Courts website, (last visited February 21, 2025).

88 Matthew Menendez, et al., *The Steep Costs of Criminal Justice Fees and Fines: A Fiscal Analysis of Three States and Ten Counties*, Brennan Center for Justice, New York University Law School (November 21, 2019).

89 Paulina Maqueda, Escamilla, *Unholy Alliance: California Courts’ Use of Private Debt Collectors*, California Reinvestment Coalition, May 2018. (Outlining how debt accounts can be transferred to the California Franchise Tax Board (FTB) for collections, which has the power to garnish wages and withhold tax refunds).

90 . In Rhode Island, courts can transfer delinquent accounts to their state debt collection agency, the Central Collections Unit (CCU). The CCU was established within the Rhode Island Department of Revenue to assist state agencies in collecting overdue debts. R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-142-8.

91 Utah Code § 63A-3-502.

92 Id.

93 Email from the Utah Division of Finance to authors dated October 15, 2024 and on file with authors.

94 These calculations are an estimate that assumes both interest rates applied and estimates the collection rate as if paid in a single lump sum. It also does not account for at what intervals interest may compound. It is also possible the collection rate could differ, given that it is charged on each payment and deposited according to a payment priority outlined in agency rules, which could affect its impact on the principle if paid payments were made in installments. See, Utah Division of Administrative Services. R21-1-7 (d).

95 “[State Debt Collection Fund](#)” COBI - Compendium of Budget Information, Utah State Legislature website, (last visited January 4, 2025).

96 Utah Code § 63A-3-505

97 Utah Code § 63A-3-504 (instructing OSDC to establish rules to govern collection techniques in accordance with its statutory authority).

98 Menendez et al., *supra* note 88.

99 A5587, Sess. of 2022 (New Jersey 2022), <https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562023/20230630g.shtml>

100 The fiscal impact from the fee elimination bill was estimated to be approximately \$4 million in the first year, which was based on prior revenue generated by that fee, not on the waiver of uncollected debt. See <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://pub.njleg.gov/Bills/2022/S4000/3771.E2.PDF>

101 HB21-1315, Sess. of 2021 (Colorado 2021), <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1315>

102 The fiscal note for HB21-1315 can be found at: https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2021A/bills/fn/2021a_hb1315_f1.pdf

103 AB1869, Sess. of 2020 (California 2020), https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1869

104 The fiscal note for AB-1869 can be found at: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1869#.

105 City and County of San Francisco Treasurer And Tax Collector, “California Becomes the First State in the Nation to End Collection of Fees in the Criminal Legal System” (2020), <https://sftreasurer.org/california-becomes-first-state-nation-end-collection-fees-criminal-legal-system>

106 06. Colorado, Iowa, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah and Washington all requested payment to fulfill the public record requests. See Appendix H for details.

107 07. For example, Florida imposed significantly more monetary sanctions than any other state in our dataset, often exceeding Pennsylvania—the state with the second-highest total—by \$300 million annually. Similarly, Utah’s data for fiscal year 2022 showed an unusual spike, with impositions increasing by over \$230 million from the previous year. These outliers would distort the analysis if we relied on averages, making the median a more reliable measure of central tendency to accurately reflect broader trends.

108 One exception was in Alabama; before sending a public records request, we found a public General Fund report with the relevant data and so did not need to send a request to this fiscal office.

109 California, Delaware, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin

110 Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Washington, D.C.

111 Alabama, Hawaii, Nebraska, and Minnesota,

112 Washington

113 Tennessee

114 Arizona, Connecticut, Kansas, Utah

115 Hawaii, Iowa, Michigan, Wyoming

116 Vittorio Nastasi & Caroline Greer, Fines and fees: Consequences and opportunities for Reform, The Reason Foundation, 9-10 (2023).

117 We found that many courts suspended or restricted non-essential services under various directives, moved to virtual or hybrid models, and prioritized critical cases. Numerous jurisdictions halted late penalty notices and stopped assessing penalties on overdue citations, and many paused automated driver's license suspensions due to failures to appear. Additionally, some jurisdictions stopped referring past-due payment cases to revenue departments for collections, while others delayed time payments. Some jurisdictions suspended warrant execution, which helped prevent immediate legal consequences for those unable to pay court debts. The instances of such changes that we identified were temporary measures, with most only lasting a few months.

118 South Carolina Judicial Branch, "Municipal Court Jurisdiction," judiciary website (last visited March 21, 2025).

119 Glenn Hegar, Sources of Revenue: A History of State Taxes and Fees in Texas, 1972 to 2022, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (2022): 96-100.