

CITIES & COUNTIES FOR Fine and Fee Justice

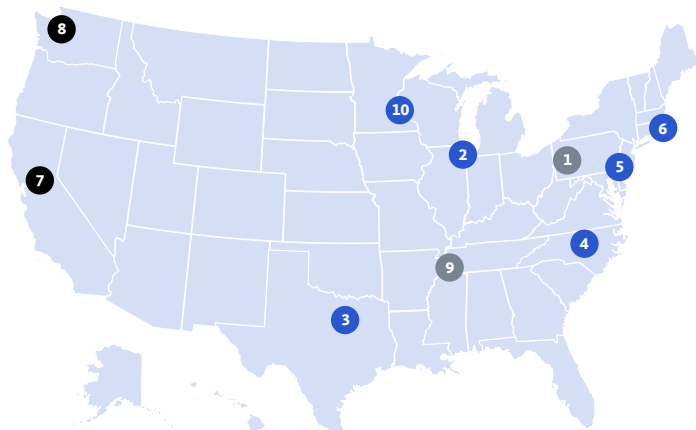
Join a national leadership network making a difference in communities across the country by eliminating and reforming unjust fines and fees.

Across the country, city and county leaders are advancing bold reforms to ensure their fines, fees, and other financial penalties do not place a disproportionate burden on low-income residents and people of color. These reforms advance racial equity, make a difference in the lives of residents, increase economic prosperity, and are feasible for government to implement.

To support and accelerate this momentum, [PolicyLink](#), [San Francisco's Financial Justice Project](#), and the [Fines and Fees Justice Center](#) established [Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice](#)—a national leadership network of localities committed to meaningful fine and fee reform that works better for people and for government. We will be launching the second cohort of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice in early 2022—see below for more information.

Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice, 2020–2021 Cohort

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Allegheny County, PA | ● City Team |
| 2. Chicago, IL | ● County Team |
| 3. Dallas, TX | ● City & County Team |
| 4. Durham, NC | |
| 5. Philadelphia, PA | |
| 6. Providence, RI | |
| 7. Sacramento, CA | |
| 8. Seattle/King County, WA | |
| 9. Shelby County, TN | |
| 10. St. Paul, MN | |



PolicyLink

THE FINANCIAL JUSTICE PROJECT

FFJC FINES & FEES JUSTICE CENTER

Advancing Bold Policy Solutions: Impact in Our First Year

Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice launched in May 2020. Ten teams made up of government and community representatives from across the country were each awarded \$50,000 and access to policy, research, and data experts, along with membership in a cohort of other teams also working to advance fine and fee reform.

As part of their participation, each team developed policy reform agendas that would lift a financial burden off of hundreds of thousands of residents. Collectively, the 10 teams worked to identify, develop, and implement policy reforms to help people in their cities and counties: **eliminate criminal-legal system and municipal fees; forgive outstanding debt; dramatically lower costs of phone calls and commissary items in jails; end driver's license suspensions for nonpayment of fines and fees; implement restitution funds; and, provide fine and fee waivers and reductions for people with low incomes.**

The following provides a sampling of the enacted reforms, as well as some significant reforms underway:

Fees imposed on incarcerated people

- **Allegheny County, PA:** Established a \$100 monthly stipend for incarcerated people from a fund earmarked for “inmate welfare” to use to pay for phone calls and commissary items. To date, Allegheny County has provided over \$1.8 million to incarcerated people through this fund. This was an unprecedented expenditure that received almost unanimous support from Jail Oversight Board members. Allegheny County is also working to introduce an ordinance that would eliminate profits made off of incarcerated people by passing a \$15/hr minimum wage for incarcerated workers and pushing to make jail phone calls free.

- **Philadelphia, PA:** Passed a budget to provide funding for 165 minutes of free phone calls each week for incarcerated people and eliminate commissary mark-ups. These reforms will make phone calls and commissary items more accessible and affordable to incarcerated people and support them to maintain connections to their support networks and ensure they have the hygiene and food items they need in jail.

Debt-based driver's license suspensions

- **St. Paul, MN:** Passed [legislation](#) in partnership with a statewide coalition to end debt-based driver's license suspensions due to failure to pay. Thousands of people have their driver's license suspended, not because of a driving violation, but because they could not pay their fines or fees. These suspensions make it harder for people to get and keep their jobs, further impeding their ability to pay their debt.
- **Dallas, TX:** Proposing that City Council approve ending participation in debt-based driver's license suspensions and vehicle registration holds.

Court debt and other court-related fines/fees

- **Seattle/King County, WA:** Established an innovative restitution fund through the county budget. This community-based program will support young people to receive services, support people who have been harmed, and provide restitution payments on behalf of youth who cannot afford to pay their financial obligations. This is the first publicly supported restitution fund in the country.
- **Dallas, TX:** Creating a process to improve court notifications and communications.
- **Providence, RI:** Using American Rescue Plan Act funds to establish a driver's license restoration clinic that would help people negotiate down their existing court debt and prepare the necessary documents to get their license reinstated.

Municipal fines and fees

- **Durham, NC:** Eliminated a \$250 administrative fee for owner-occupied properties that violate codes around trash and undergrowth, including elimination of all associated civil penalties. This will immediately lessen the burden of fines and remove the threat of legal action for civil penalties. Additionally, worked with the Parking Division to create a low-wage worker parking relief program pilot, providing up to three months of free parking over the summer for downtown workers who meet the income eligibility of 200 percent or below of the federal poverty level or receive government benefits. Durham

estimates that thousands of people will benefit from these reforms. Durham is also working to implement a policy that would allow first-citation late fee waivers for residents who meet the income eligibility of 200 percent or below of the federal poverty level or receive government benefits, in addition to providing payment plans for any individual receiving a parking citation who meets the above income eligibility requirement.

- **Chicago, IL:** Working to establish a need-based ticket program and ticket data portal that allows the public to analyze and track ticketing data, as well as implementing a fix-it ticket program for city/license stickers and forgiveness of late fees on tickets. This program will provide low-income residents an opportunity to pay lower fines and fees and gain meaningful debt relief.

The first year of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice demonstrated that, with proactive support, jurisdictions can enact and implement bold policies that make a tangible difference in the lives of their residents. It also showed that even with the pressure of the Covid-19 pandemic, cities and counties can prioritize fine and fee reform—in fact, a focus on addressing unjust fines and fees is critical to counteract the pandemic's devastating economic effects.

Join Us

PolicyLink, San Francisco's Financial Justice Project, and the Fines and Fees Justice Center will be launching the second cohort of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice in early 2022. **If you are interested in becoming a part of the growing number of local governments that are advancing bold reforms for their communities**, visit our [website](#) to learn more about the Network, including the upcoming Equitable Fine and Fee Reform Bootcamp, a convening where you can learn about the Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice process and begin the steps cities and counties took to enact fine and fee reform during the first cohort. Starting with the Bootcamp, you will get actionable tools and resources to lay the groundwork to advance reforms and become eligible for selection in the second cohort of Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice: <https://www.policylink.org/ccffj>

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