



Actions to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in the Criminal-Legal System: Fines & Fees Recommendations & Resources

The spread of COVID-19 is a [public health emergency](#) that is especially urgent for the [2.3 million human beings](#) caged in U.S. jails and prisons. Jails are already dangerous and unhealthy places, even outside of a global pandemic, with overcrowding, deplorable conditions, and inadequate healthcare access making jails a hotbed for infectious diseases. Based on everything we know, these conditions will cause COVID-19 to continue spreading like [wildfire](#)—and the consequences will be devastating.

At this crisis point, decarcerating jails is a legal, moral, and humanitarian imperative. We recommend that all government officials immediately take the following actions to decarcerate jails *and* mitigate the financial consequences of system-involvement.

These recommendations are adapted from the Fines and Fees Justice Center list. See the [Fines and Fees Justice Center website](#) for more detail.

For everyone who has incurred debt and/or debt-related penalties, end the financial hardship associated with these debts and penalties.

- Discharge or immediately cancel all outstanding fines, fees, and court debts. Advocate to other local actors, as necessary, who hold other debts.

Until this step is complete, pursue the following types of immediate relief:

- End the collection of fines, fees, and other court debts.
- End referrals to private collection companies.
- End the enforcement of warrants that issue or would issue for unpaid fines and fees or failures to appear that relate to the nonpayment of fines and fees.
- End the denial of any government benefits, including Section 8 vouchers, based on outstanding court debts.
- End the enforcement of driver's license suspensions that relate to unpaid court debt or failing to appear.
- End the practice of booting, towing and impounding vehicles for unpaid fines, fees, and other court debts.
- End the issuance of parking tickets and municipal code violations that do not impact public safety.
- Do not require payments on any financial penalties (e.g. fines), fees, or court debts while the coronavirus crisis remains in effect.

EXAMPLES:

- *Maine has [vacated all outstanding warrants](#) for unpaid fines and fees.*
- *Minnesota is [halting driver's license suspensions](#) for unpaid fines and fees, and it is suspending late fees and new referrals for collections.*
- *Shelby County, Tennessee [does not charge fees for phone calls and video calls](#) from the Jail.*
- *Multnomah County, Oregon is [suspending evictions](#) during the COVID-19 outbreak.*