



# FINES AND FEES INDEX WASHINGTON

**National Rank:** 

1st

Score:

59/100

In Washington and across the country, state and local governments impose fines as punishment for everything from traffic and municipal code violations to felonies. Courts then tax people with fees, surcharges, and other assessments that fund law enforcement, the court system, and other government operations. Fines and fees for even a single incident can add up to thousands of dollars. People unable to pay these sums immediately may face steep penalties, including additional fees, driver's license suspensions, revocation of voting rights, and even incarceration.

Fines and fees can keep people in a cycle of poverty, causing people to lose their jobs, their homes, and sometimes their children. The same monetary sanction that trivially inconveniences an affluent person can prevent a low-income family from paying the rent. But fines and fees are often set without regard to a person's financial situation. They create a two-tiered system, placing justice out of reach for many low-income people, including a disproportionate number of people of color.

That is why the National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) based at Fordham Law School convened a task force of experts from around the country to identify best policies to rein in these abuses. In all, NCAJ identified 17 policies that are critical to creating a fairer system that does not criminalize poverty and respects the rights of litigants. NCAJ researched state and local laws in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. and graded the jurisdictions on a scale of 0 to 100 according to how their policies measure up, creating the Fines and Fees Justice Index. In short, no state did well. Only three states scored higher than 50 out of 100 and no state received a passing score.

The good news, however, is that almost every policy we track has been adopted by at least one state. That means that states need not invent good policies whole cloth. Rather, each state could implement more rights-respecting policies simply by looking to what other states are already doing.

This report provides a snapshot of how Washington fared on all 17 policy benchmarks — and subbenchmarks — along with recommendations for how the state can improve access to justice. To see how all states scored on the Fines and Fees Justice Index, read about their policies, and see the methodology for how NCAJ arrived at the scores, visit the Fines and Fees Justice Index at <a href="https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/fines-and-fees">https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/fines-and-fees</a>.



# Fines and Fees Justice Index Washington Score At-a-Glance

National Rank:
1st
Score:
59/100

Or: a. I las at least ato ecounty or municipality abolished all local fees?  Dr. a. I las at least one county or municipality abolished all local fees?  b. Has the state abolished "counsel fees"?  c. Has the state abolished "incarceration fees"?  d. bid the state take stapes to end fees in past 4 years?  2 No  d. bid the state take stapes to end fees in past 4 years?  3 Yes  2. Abolition of juvenile court fees and fines  Has the state abolished all juvenile court fees and fines?  6 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No  1 Has the state abolished all juvenile fees but not fines?  2 No  4 Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fines?  2 No  4 Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fees?  4 No  5 Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fees?  6 No  7 Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  9 No  1 No  1 No  1 No  1 No  2 No  2 No  3 No  4 Private debt collection  1 No  1 No  1 No  1 No  2 No  4 Private debt collection  2 No  3 No  3 No  4 Private debt collection  2 No  3 No  3 No  4 Private debt collection  3 No  4 Private debt collection  4 No  5 Does at least one major county/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No  2 No  4 Does the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?  1 No  5 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No  2 No  4 Private debt collection  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3 No  4 Private debt collection  5 No  6 No  6 No  6 No  6 No  6 No  6 No  7 No  6 No  6 No  7 No  6 No  6 No  7 No  8 No  9 No  6 No  6 No  7 No  8 No  9 No  9 No  9 No  1 No  2 No  1 No  2 No  2 No  2 No  4 Private debt collection  1 No  2 No  2 No  2 No  4 Private debt collection  1 No  2 No  2 No  3 No  4 No  4 Private debt collection  2 No  3 No  6	1.	Abo	ition of fees	Weight	Score: 4/10
b. Has the state abolished "incarceration fees"? c. Has the state tabe in past 4 years? 2 No d. Did the state take steps to end fees in past 4 years? 3 Yes  2. Abolition of juvenile court fees and fines  Weight Score: 0/6  Has the state abolished all juvenile court fees and fines? 6 No Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines? 2 No d. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines? 2 No d. Has the state abolished juvenile frees but not fines? 4 No e. Has the state abolished juvenile frees but not fines? 4 No e. Has the state abolished juvenile frees but not fines? 6 No Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?  4. Private debt collection Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No Or: a. Do sat least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 2 Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 3 No Does the state trequire private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? 4 Does the state require from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 5 No Does the state require from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 5 No Does the state require require the provential but to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 No Can people request an ability to pay d		Hast	he state abolished all fees?	10	No
c. Has the state abolished "incarceration fees"? d. Did the state take steps to end fees in past 4 years? 3 Yes  2. Abolition of juvenile court fees and fines  Weight Score: 0/6  Has the state abolished all juvenile court fees and fines? 6 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state abolished juvenile fense but not fines? 2 No d. Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fines? 2 No e. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collector? 2 Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 2 Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 2 Does the state require courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? 3 N/A 6 Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in 1 No Does the state require ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A 6 Can people request an ability to pay determinations for fines? 2 N/A  Does the state require		Or:			
d. Did the state take steps to end fees in past 4 years?  2. Abolition of juvenile court fees and fines  Has the state abolished all juvenile court fees and fines?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No b. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No c. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines? 2 No d. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines? 2 No e. Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fees e. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  I No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  I No Ones the state take bar courts from using private collection firms?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  I No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  I No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  I No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  I No b. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collector?  I Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  A Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  Does the state require depression of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  A Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  A Do all but some					
Has the state abolished all juvenile court fees and fines?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  c. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines?  d. Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fees  e. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest  Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No  Criminal Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No  Or: a. Do bes the state require revivate collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state prequire private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Does the state one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  3 N/A  c. Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  3 N/A  c. Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchma					
Or:       a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?       3       No         b. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?       1       No         c. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines?       2       No         d. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fees       4       No         e. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fees       4       No         fees in the last 4 years?       2       No     **Conflicts of interest**  **Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?*  **Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?       1       No         Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?       1       No         b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?       1       No         c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?       1       No         Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?       1       No         Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?       1       No         Or: a. Does the state require private collection firms?       3       No         Or: a. Does the state parcourts from using private collection firms?       1       No         or: a. Does the state base require minicipality meet th	2.	Abo	ition of juvenile court fees and fines	Weight	Score: 0/6
b. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines? 2 No d. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest 8 Weight Score: 0/6  Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees? 1 No  4. Private debt collection 8 Weight Score: 0/3  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1.5 No c. Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No c. Does the state require private collectors compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations Weight Score: 6/6  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 N/A c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A c. Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration? 5 N/A  Does at least one major county/muni		Hast	he state abolished all juvenile court fees and fines?	6	No
c. Has the state abolished juvenile fees but not fines? d. Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fees e. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest  Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?  1 No Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  4. Private debt collection  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3 No Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No c. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  1 No Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3 No Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1 No Does the state har equire private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  4. Does the state har courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  6. Does the state har protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  3 N/A  b. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  3 N/A  4 Can people request an ability to pay determinations for fines?  5 N/A  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  5 N/A  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  5 Yes Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5 N/A		Or:			No
d. Has the state abolished juvenile fines but not fees e. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees? 1 No  4. Private debt collection Weight Score: 0/3 Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? 4. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges? Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 3 N/A  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  Pobes at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay? 5 Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/					
e. Has the state taken significant steps to abolish juvenile court fines and/or fees in the last 4 years?  3. Conflicts of interest  Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  1. No  2. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?  4. Private debt collection  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3. No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1. No  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3. No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark?  1. No  Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  1. No  6. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require ability to pay determinations or fines?  Or: a. Does the state nequire ability to pay determination?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  5. N/A  Poil but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does the state codified standards for judg					
3. Conflicts of interest  Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees? 1 No  4. Private debt collection Weight Score: 0/3  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1.5 No  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1.5 No  c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, sasessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations frines? 3 N/A  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination? 2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality to pay sis willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
Does the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees? 1 No  4. Private debt collection Weight Score: 0/3  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1.5 No o. c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations Weight Score: 6/6  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination? 2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  Fight Score: 10/10  The state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay? 5 Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/muni				2	No
enforcement and courts?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees? 1 No  4. Private debt collection Weight Score: 0/3  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations Weight Score: 6/6 Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A d. Can people request an ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A d. Can people request an ability to pay determination? 2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay Weight Score: 10/10 Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  7. Ability to pay standards  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A	3.	Conf	icts of interest	Weight	Score: 0/6
b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?  1 No  Private debt collection  Weight Score: 0/3  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Weight Score: 6/6  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  5 Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A Can belility to pay standards 6 Vesimposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A Core: 5/5 Core: 5/5 Core: 5/5 Core: 0. Core:		Does	the state ensure that fines & fees revenue does not directly fund law		
c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees? 1 No  4. Private debt collection Weight Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms? 3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations Weight Score: 6/6  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges? Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A d. Can people request an ability to pay determination? 2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  7. Ability to pay standards Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A		Or:	a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	1	No
4. Private debt collection  Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?  3 No  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 1.5 No b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 No amount collected? d. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected? e. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act? 1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges? Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 6 Can people request an ability to pay determination?  6 Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 7 N/A  Ability to pay standards 8 Weight Score: 5/5  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay? 5 Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  N/A  Does all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  N/A  N/A  Does all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  N/A  Does all but some counties/municipality meet the benchmark? 5 N/A  N/A  Does all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 7 N/A  Does all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 8 N/A  N/A  Does Does all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 9 N/A			b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	1	No
Does the state bar courts from using private collection firms?   3   No			c. Has the state capped the % of local budgets raised from fines & fees?	1	No
Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  No  Sometimes of the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  6. Willful failure to pay  Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5 N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  5 N/A  Ability to pay standards  Weight Score: 5/5  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  5 Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5 N/A	4.				
b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No  5. Abbility to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or:  a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  5. Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or:  a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5. N/A  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  5. N/A  Ability to pay standards  Weight Score: 5/5  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  5. Yes  Or:  a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5. N/A		Does		3	No
c. Does the state require private collectors' compensation be unrelated to the amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  5. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5. N/A  7. Ability to pay standards  Weight Score: 5/5  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  5. N/A  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5. N/A  7. Ability to pay standards  Weight Score: 5/5  Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5. N/A		Or:			
amount collected?  d. Does the state bar courts from imposing surcharges on fines and fees in private collection?  e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  1 No  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  5. Weight Score: 10/10  Weight Score: 10/10  Yes imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  5. N/A  Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  T. Ability to pay standards  Weight Score: 5/5  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Testing and fees in 1 No  No  No  No  No  No  N/A  No  No  No  No  No  No  No  No  No  N				_	
private collection? e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?  5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  5. Willful failure to pay  Weight Score: 10/10  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  T. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Tes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?			amount collected?		No
5. Ability to pay determinations  Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  5. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  To pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  To a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state imposing some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  Does determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Does the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?				1	No
Does the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 3 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? 3 N/A d. Can people request an ability to pay determination? 2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay Weight Score: 10/10 Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 5 N/A b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A  7. Ability to pay standards Weight Score: 5/5 Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay? 5 Yes Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 2.5 N/A			e. Does the state have protections of the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act?	1	No
imposing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  6. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  T. Ability to pay standards  Weight Score: 5/5  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2.5 N/A	5.				
Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?  d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  6. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  7. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2.5 N/A		Does	the state require courts to conduct an ability to pay determinations when sing fines, fees, assessments or surcharges?	6	Yes
c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines? d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  7. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2.5 N/A		_	a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	3	,
d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?  2 N/A  6. Willful failure to pay  Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  7. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2 N/A  Yes  N/A  N/A  7. Ability to pay standards  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2 N/A			b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	1	N/A
<ul> <li>6. Willful failure to pay         Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?         Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?         b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?         1 N/A         N/A</li></ul>			c. Does the state require ability to pay determinations for fines?	3	N/A
Does the state require the government to prove failure to pay is willful before imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  7. Ability to pay standards Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2.5 N/A			d. Can people request an ability to pay determination?	2	N/A
imposing sanctions, including incarceration?  Or: a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?  7. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?  2.5 N/A	6.			Weight	Score: 10/10
b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A  7. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay? 5 Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 2.5 N/A				10	Yes
b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark? 1 N/A  7. Ability to pay standards  Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay? 5 Yes  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 2.5 N/A		Or:	a. Do most counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	5	N/A
Has the state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?  5 Yes Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 2.5 N/A					
Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark? 2.5 N/A	7.			Weight	
		Has	he state codified standards for judges to determine ability to pay?	5	Yes
		Or:			

8.	Presumption of indigence		Score: 5/5
	Has state codified standards for the presumption of indigence?	5	Yes
	Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	2.5 1	N/A
	b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	1	N/A
9.	Waiver or modification of fines and fees	Weight	Score: 4/8
	Do judges have discretion to waive or modify fines and fees?	8	No
	<b>Or:</b> a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	3	No
	b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	1	No
	c. Does the state meet the benchmark a) only for fines, or b) only for some fees,	4	Yes
	assessments and/or surcharges?		
10.	Payment plans	Weight	Score: 0/3
	Can anyone pay fines & fees on a payment plan without penalty?	3	No
	<b>Or:</b> a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	1.5	No
	b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	1	No
11	Day fines	Weight	Score: 0/3
	Does the state mandate or encourage courts to use day fines?	3	No No
	Or: a. Is at least one court in the state piloting or using day fines?	1	No
4.2	Disht to council	14/aial-i-	Cooper 6/6
12.	Right to counsel	Weight	
	Is there a right to counsel for people facing incarceration for failure to pay?  Or: a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	<b>6</b> 3	Yes N/A
	b. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	3 1	N/A N/A
13.	Driver's license suspension	Weight	Score: 2/6
	Does the state law bar driver's license suspension for failure to pay and failure to appear in court?	6	No
	<b>Or:</b> a. Does the state allow suspension of driver's licenses for failure to pay, but	2	Yes
	only in some driving-related cases?	_	100
	b. Does the state bar driver's license suspension for failure to pay but permit it	3	No
	for failure to appear?	_	
	c. Does the state bar driver's license suspension for failure to appear but	3	No
	permit it for failure to pay?		
14.	Voting Rights	Weight	Score: 6/6
	Does the state allow restoration of voting rights if people have unpaid fines and	6	Yes
	fees, including where fines and fees are a condition of probation or parole?		
15.	Records expungement	Weight	Score: 6/6
	Does the state allow sealing of records or records expungement if people have	6	Yes
	outstanding fines and/or fees?	2	NI / A
	<b>Or:</b> a. Do all but some counties/municipalities meet the benchmark?	3	N/A
16.	Data collection and reporting	Weight	Score: 0/6
	a. Does the state collect/publish data on fines & fees imposed, and revenue	1	No
	collected?	4	X.T
	b. Data on people incarcerated for failure to pay fines and fees?	1	No
	c. Data on fines and fees imposed, broken down by race?	1	No
	d. Data on fines and fees imposed, broken down by age?	1	No
	e. Data on fines and fees imposed, broken down by gender?	1	No
17.	COVID response	Weight	Score: 5/5
	Did the state enact at least one significant, temporary measure to mitigate impact	5	Yes
	of fines and fees during the COVID-19 pandemic?  a. Does at least one major county/municipality meet the benchmark?	2	N/A
	a. Does at least one major country/municipality meet the benchmark?	4	11/11

# Washington's Fines and Fees Justice Index Score

Washington scored 59 out of 100 points on the Fines and Fees Justice Index. It ranked first in the nation, but it still did not receive a passing score. Below, we explain in more detail how Washington fared on each of the Fines and Fees Justice Index benchmarks and we describe how it could do better.

**Benchmark 1: Abolition of Fees** 

Washington Score: 4 out of 10 points

Recognizing that fees serve no role in making communities safer and that they unfairly force people who come into contact with the courts to pay for a system that serves all of society, the Justice Index sets a goal of abolishing all court fees. No state has yet abolished all court fees, but one in three has moved to abolish some of the most pernicious fees. These include fees for appointed counsel in criminal cases and fees for a person's incarceration, such as per diem "pay to stay" fees and charges for the cost of meals and other basic necessities. Washington imposes a range of fees, including fees for the services of appointed counsel. The state received partial credit, however, because during the COVID-19 pandemic, Seattle Municipal Court judges voted to eliminate all discretionary fines and fees imposed in criminal cases. The fees eliminated include the probation supervision fee, records check fee, work crew fee, and community service setup fee. In addition, in 2018 the state made progress by barring the imposition of interest on unpaid fines and fees.

**Recommendation:** Washington should abolish all fees. Short of that, it should abolish the most pernicious fees, including fees for appointed counsel and incarceration fees.

**Benchmark 2: Juvenile Court Fines and Fees** 

**Washington Score: 0 out of 6 points** 

A growing body of research shows that juvenile court fines and fees, which require children or their families to pay when a child has contact with the juvenile courts, impede rehabilitation, increase recidivism, and can create family instability by placing financial stress on families already struggling to make ends meet. For that reason, a growing number of states are moving to abolish juvenile court fines and fees. Washington, however, imposes juvenile court fines and fees.

**Recommendation:** Washington should abolish all juvenile court fines and fees, as Delaware, New Jersey, New Mexico and New York have done.

Benchmark 3: Barring Conflicts of Interest Around Fines and Fees Revenue

**Washington Score: 0 out of 6 points** 

In many states, fines and fees pay for some or all of law enforcement and court system budgets. This use of the revenue can create perverse incentives, encouraging police to make more stops and arrests and court personnel to ratchet up punishments to pay their own salaries. Alaska, New York, South Dakota, and Utah have all avoided this conflict of interest by ensuring that revenue raised from fines and fees does not go directly into law enforcement or court budgets. Washington, however, has not taken this critical step. iv

**Recommendation:** To eliminate conflicts of interest that can increase fines and fees, the state should ensure that revenue from these charges does not go into law enforcement or court budgets.

#### Benchmark 4: Private Collection of Fines and Fees Debt

Washington Score: 0 out of 3 points

Debt collection agencies often add large surcharges to bills they are collecting. Because they may only get paid when they collect money, debt collection agencies also have an incentive to use predatory practices to squeeze money from people who may not be able to afford it. When states allow private agencies to collect fines and fees, those agencies profit while people who cannot pay incur even more debt. For that reason, one in three states have either outlawed the use of private debt collection agencies to collect unpaid court debts or have taken steps to rein in abusive practices. Washington, however, still allows this practice.

**Recommendation:** Washington should bar the use of private debt collection agencies to collect fines and fees.

#### Benchmark 5: Consideration of Ability to Pay at Sentencing

**Washington Score: 6 out of 6 points** 

Recognizing the harms of charging people fines and fees they simply cannot afford to pay, one in four states require courts to conduct ability to pay assessments every time they order a person to pay a fine, fee, assessment or surcharge. Washington requires courts to conduct an ability to pay assessment any time they impose fines or fees. Vi

**Recommendation:** Washington should continue the practice of requiring courts to conduct ability to pay assessments when imposing fines, fees, surcharges, or other costs.

#### Benchmark 6: Proof of Willful Failure to Pay Before Incarceration or Other Sanctions

Washington Score: 10 out of 10 points

In 1983 the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Bearden v. Georgia* that courts cannot incarcerate a person for failure to pay court debts unless the failure to pay was "willful." Nevertheless, only 15 states require courts to conduct a hearing and find that the person's failure to pay was willful before ordering

incarceration or the imposition of other sanctions, including the suspension of a driver's license. Washington requires such a finding.  $^{\rm vii}$ 

**Recommendation:** Washington should abolish incarceration as a sanction for failure to pay and should require courts to find that failure to pay was willful before imposing any other sanctions.

#### Benchmark 7: Ability to Pay Standards

Washington Score: 5 out of 5 points

When courts conduct ability to pay determinations, they often do so without clear, uniform standards about how to conduct the proceedings, the evidence to consider, and the criteria to gauge what a person is able to pay. This can lead to wildly different results across court rooms, leaving many people unprotected. For that reason, 11 states have codified standards giving clear guidance to judges. Washington requires courts conducting ability to pay determinations to consider: (i) the person's income and assets, (ii) the person's basic living costs including other legal financial obligations, and (iii) the person's bona fide efforts to acquire additional resources. Viiii

**Recommendation:** Washington should continue to provide—and periodically update—clear standards for determining ability to pay.

#### Benchmark 8: Standards that Trigger a Presumption of Indigence

Washington Score: 5 out of 5 points

Eight states have codified standards that trigger a presumption that a person is indigent and, therefore, unable to pay fines, fees, costs, surcharges or assessments. In some states, the fact that a person is entitled to appointed counsel or receives public benefits is enough to trigger the presumption that they cannot pay fines and fees. In others, a certain income threshold triggers the presumption. Washington has codified a definition of indigence that includes an inquiry into whether a person is unhoused, has income below 125 percent of the federal poverty level and expenses that render the person unable to pay, or other compelling circumstances.<sup>ix</sup>

**Recommendation:** Washington should periodically assess the indigence standards and update them to reflect today's economic reality and costs of living.

#### Benchmark 9: Discretion to Modify or Waive Fines and Fees

Washington Score: 4 out of 8 points

To ensure that fines and fees reflect what people can actually afford to pay, judges must have discretion in individual cases. Eighteen states give judges the ability to waive or modify all fines, fees, surcharges and assessments according to the person's ability to pay, and nearly every state give judges the ability to

waive or modify these costs in at least some circumstances. Washington imposes some mandatory fines and fees, which judges cannot waive or modify. It received partial credit because judges have discretion to waive or modify most fines, fees, and other costs.<sup>x</sup>

**Recommendation:** Washington should give judges discretion to waive or modify all fines, fees, and other costs.

**Benchmark 10: Payment Plans** 

**Washington Score: 0 out of 3 points** 

Bars on payment plans create needless barriers to payment for people who cannot pay an entire fine or fee up front, but some states never allow people to use payment plans. Others authorize—but do not require—judges to allow payment plans, leaving some people who cannot afford to pay upfront vulnerable. States should mandate that anyone can choose to pay fines and fees on a payment plan if they cannot afford to pay immediately, without incurring any additional fees or interest charges, but only five do so to date. Washington requires judges to create a payment schedule, but only if the person is indigent. If the person is not indigent, the state does not authorize the use of payment plans. xi

**Recommendation:** Washington should mandate that anyone can choose to pay fines and fees on a payment plan, without incurring any additional fees or interest charges.

**Benchmark 11: Individualized Fines** 

Washington Score: 0 out of 3 points

To date, Oklahoma is the only state that has adopted individualized fines, sometimes referred to as "day fines." Individualized fines, long used in Germany and other European countries, are scaled to the severity of the offense and the person's income, helping to ensure that fines are adjusted to what people can afford to pay, and that people with greater income experience penalty of equivalent impact for violation of the same law.<sup>xii</sup>

**Recommendation:** Washington should follow Oklahoma's lead and institute day fines. Scaling fines not only to the severity of the person's offense but also to their income helps to ensure that people who are poor or working class do not experience much harsher punishments for the same behavior as wealthy people who can afford to pay.

Benchmark 12: Right to Counsel When Incarceration is Possible

**Washington Score: 6 out of 6 points** 

More than half of states give people the right to an attorney at court hearings if the person may face jail time for failure to pay a fine, fee, surcharge, or assessment. Washington provides such a right to counsel.xiii

**Recommendation:** Washington should continue the practice of providing counsel when a person may face incarceration for failure to pay. It could become a national model by eliminating the possibility of incarceration altogether in such cases.

#### Benchmark 13: Driver's License Suspension for Failure to Pay Fines and Fees

Washington Score: 2 out of 6 points

Eighty-six percent of Americans drive to work. A driver's license is also necessary to take children to school, buy groceries, go to doctor's appointments, and meet many other basic needs. But courts often suspend driver's licenses for failure to pay fines and fees, or for failure to appear at hearings connected with fines and fees payments, forcing people either to lose their jobs and face other hardships, or drive with a suspended license risking further penalties and punishments. For that reason, there is growing momentum to end the suspension of driver's licenses. Now, three in five states bar the suspension of driver's licenses for failure to pay fines and fees. Washington amended its laws in 2021 to give judges more discretion over license suspension for failure to pay. However, the state still received only partial credit because it authorizes the suspension of driver's licenses for failure to pay and failure to appear at hearings for nonpayment, but only in cases connected to some driving-related charges.

**Recommendation:** Washington should build on the progress it has made and eliminate the practice of suspending driver's licenses for failure to pay or failure to appear, including in driving-related cases.

#### **Benchmark 14: Voting Rights**

Washington Score: 6 out of 6 points

During the Jim Crow era, states passed laws designed to prevent Black people from voting, including poll taxes. There is no defensible good government nexus between money and voting. Today, however, a form of poll tax still exists. In many states, people lose the right to vote when they are convicted of a felony. Almost half of states block people from restoring their voting rights unless and until they pay all fines and fees. As of January 1, 2022, Washington restores the right to vote to people with felony convictions upon release from prison. It no longer conditions the right to vote on the payment of fines and fees.

**Recommendation:** Washington should continue to allow people to exercise the fundamental right to vote.

#### Benchmark 15: Conditioning Expungement on the Payment of Fines and Fees

**Washington Score: 6 out of 6 points** 

One in three people in the United States has a criminal record, which can interfere with a person's ability to find a job, rent or buy a home, enroll in higher education, access government benefits and more. Some criminal records can be sealed from public view or removed through expungement, making it easier for people to get back on their feet after satisfying a criminal sentence. One in four states allows people to expunge or seal their records notwithstanding that they have unpaid fines and fees. Washington does not condition expungement of records on the payment of fines and fees, but it limits expungements to nonconvictions. That means that cases in which there is a conviction cannot be expunged. \*\*vi

**Recommendation:** Washington should expand access to expungements so that people who have been convicted of a crime can expunge their records after a period of time, regardless of whether they have outstanding fines and fees.

**Benchmark 16: Data Transparency** 

**Washington Score: 0 out of 6 points** 

To understand the magnitude of the problem and to identify solutions, it is critical for states to collect and publicize data about fines and fees, including the totals that state and local governments assess and actually collect; fines and fee amounts imposed, broken down by race and ethnicity, age, gender, and income level; and number of people incarcerated for failure to pay. Washington does not publish any such data.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Recommendation:** Washington should collect and report data about fines and fees, including amounts imposed— broken down by race and ethnicity, age, gender, and income level—as well as revenue collected. It should also collect and report on the number of people incarcerated for failure to pay.

Benchmark 17: Temporary Measures to Mitigate the of Fines and Fees During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Washington Score: 5 out of 5 points** 

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic fallout caused financial hardship across our society. Early in the crisis, tens of millions of people lost their jobs. Although employment numbers gradually improved, the challenges persisted. Near the end of 2021, 20 million households reported that they did not have enough to eat and 10 million households reported that they were behind on rent. Almost half of states took steps to change their fines and fees policies in light of these new economic circumstances. Washington temporarily halted the suspension of driver's licenses for failure to appear in court.

**Recommendation:** The COVID-19 pandemic and its financial toll revealed many ways society could be operating differently, including in practices around fines and fees. In anticipation of future pandemic surges and other potential challenges, including financial hardships, Washington should continue to review and reform its policies on fines and fees, guided by the benchmarks set forth above.

## **Conclusion**

The overall findings of the Fines and Fees Justice Index are sobering. No state received a passing score. The findings do, however, provide some room for optimism. Almost all of the 17 benchmarks have been adopted by at least one state. That means that states need not reinvent the wheel. To implement better, more rights-respecting policies, in most cases they need only look to what other states are already doing. To see how other states fare, visit <a href="https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/fines-and-fees">https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/fines-and-fees</a>.

### **End Notes**

viii Id.

- <sup>x</sup> See, e.g., Wash. Rev. Code 7.68.035 (defining an assessment); Wash. Rev. Code 9.94A.760 (noting that indigence is not grounds to fail to impose that assessment, but is grounds to waive or modify other fines and fees); Wash. Rev. Code 43.43.7541.
- xi See Wash. Rev. Code § 10.01.170. In 2022 ,Washington expanded the number of people eligiblie to pay on installment plans. Previously, payment plans were only available if people met the criteria of indigence pursuant Wash. Rev. Code § 10.101.010(3)(a)-(c) (which define indigence based on receipt of public benefits and income caps.) Now, people may also pay on installment plans if they meet the definition of indigence pursuant to Wash. Rev. Code § 10.101.010(3)(d) (a person is indigent if they are "unable to pay the anticipated cost of counsel for the matter before the court because his or her available funds are insufficient to pay any amount for the retention of counsel.")
- xii See 22 Okla. Stat. Ann. § 991a(A)(1)(y).
- xiii See Smith v. Whatcom Cnty. Dist. Ct., 52 P.3d 485, 493 (Wash. 2002).
- xiv See Wash. Rev. Code § 46.20.289; Wash. Rev. Code § 46.63.110.
- xv See "Felony Convictions and Voting Rights," Wash. Sec'y of State, https://perma.cc/U6G9-4RFI.
- xvi Wash. Rev. Code § 10.97.060.
- xvii See Maria Raphael, *The High Price of Using Justice Fines and Fees to Fund Government in Washington State*, Vera Inst. of Justice, Jun. 2021, at 14, <a href="https://perma.cc/WEZ2-Q9PK">https://perma.cc/WEZ2-Q9PK</a> ("There is no single data source that compiles revenue from fines and fees for all governments in the state").
- xviii "Tracking the COVID-19 Economy's Effect on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Feb. 10, 2022, <a href="https://perma.cc/E9GQ-SFNI">https://perma.cc/E9GQ-SFNI</a>.
- xix "COVID-19 Fines and Fees Policy Tracker," Fines and Fees Justice Center (2020), <a href="https://perma.cc/E6F8-H7YC">https://perma.cc/E6F8-H7YC</a>. See also, "Ending the Burden of Fines and Fees During COVID-19," Brennan Center for Justice (Jan. 7, 2022), <a href="https://perma.cc/7N85-E6F9">https://perma.cc/7N85-E6F9</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See, e.g., U.S. Comm'n on Civil Rights, *Targeted Fines and Fees Against Communities of Color: Civil Rights & Constitutional Implications* (Sept. 2017), <a href="https://perma.cc/W7Y7-C7MW">https://perma.cc/W7Y7-C7MW</a>.

<sup>&</sup>quot;See, e.g., Wash. Rev. Code §§ 9.94A.7603, 9.94A.030(31), 9.94A.7601, 10.73.160(3), 70.48.130(5); Daniel Beekman, Seattle Municipal Court has stopped charging fees for probation in criminal cases, Seattle Times (Sept, 23, 2020), <a href="https://perma.cc/64P8-50MV">https://perma.cc/64P8-50MV</a>. See also 2018 Wash. Session Laws 269, https://perma.cc/4GY5-6XXH.

Fees include charges for cost of counsel (Wash. Rev. Code § 10.101.020) and various other fees under chapter 13.40. See also Wash. Rev. Code § 13.40.200; Wash. Rev. Code § 13.40.192.

iv See, e.g., Wash. Rev. Code § 43.08.250; Wash. Rev. Code §10.82.070.

v "Benton and Sonohomish counties, and the city of Pasco ... use nCourt, which charges a 4-7% service and processing fee .... Franklin County, Adams County, Everett, Ritzville, and Othello use Official Payments Corporation, which charges a 4% convenience fee for each payment. The city of Des Moines uses Paymentus." Alexes Harris et al, "Monetary Sanctions in Washington" in Monetary Sanctions in the Criminal Justice System (Laura and John Arnold Foundation, Apr. 2017), <a href="https://perma.cc/4GLU-5ES9">https://perma.cc/4GLU-5ES9</a>. See also Wash. Rev. Code ch. 19.16.

vi See State v. Blazina, 344 P.3d 680 (Wash. 2015).

vii See Wash. Rev. Code § 10.01.180(3).

ix Wash. Rev. Code §§ 10.01.160(3), 10.101.010, 10.01.180(3)(b).