



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs
Civil Rights Division
Office for Access to Justice

Washington, D.C. 20530

March 14, 2016

Dear Colleagues:

In December of last year, the Department of Justice brought together judges, court administrators, advocates, prosecutors, and defense attorneys to participate in a working session on “Poverty and the Criminal Justice System: The Effect and Fairness of Fees and Fines.” The Department’s working session was followed the next day by a meeting at the White House on “A Cycle of Incarceration: Prison, Debt and Bail Practices.” These extraordinary convenings raised many critical issues, and highlighted several promising ideas and strategies for reform.

At the end of the meetings, the Department pledged to continue working with the diverse communities represented to help address the complex challenges the assessment and enforcement of fines and fees pose. We are pleased to announce today several initiatives that will help stakeholders make the changes needed to guarantee equal justice under law to everyone, regardless of their financial circumstances.

- The Department’s Bureau of Justice Assistance will be awarding [\\$2.5 million in competitive grants](#) to state, local, or tribal jurisdictions, who together with community partners, want to test strategies to restructure the assessment and enforcement of fines and fees through the *Price of Justice: Rethinking the Consequences of Justice Fines and Fees* grant program. Four grants of \$500,000 will be awarded to agencies and their collaborative partners to develop strategies that promote appropriate justice system responses, including reducing unnecessary confinement for individuals who are unable to pay fines and fees. An additional grant of \$500,000 will be awarded to a technical assistance provider. For agencies interested in applying for this funding opportunity, BJA will host an informational webinar on March 28, 2016, at 11:30 a.m. to describe the background, key concepts, and requirements of the solicitation. To register, please follow this [link](#).
- The Bureau of Justice Assistance plans to provide resources to support the new National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices, led by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators. The Task Force, which will also be funded by the State Justice Institute, will be comprised of

national leaders from the judiciary, bar, state and local government, the advocacy community, and the academy. It will work to draft model statutes, court rules, and policies and procedures, and will serve as a clearinghouse for best practices and resources. Department officials will also serve as ex officio members of the Task Force.

- The Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center is releasing [Resource Guide: Reforming the Assessment and Enforcement of Fines and Fees](#), listing issue studies and various publications related to fines, fees, and other financial obligations. The resources are intended to help executive-level leaders make informed policy decisions and pursue sound strategies at the state, local, and tribal levels.
- The Department has written a “Dear Colleague” letter to state Chief Justices and state court administrators to provide greater clarity to state and local courts regarding their legal obligations with respect to the enforcement of fines and fees. The letter is attached.

We hope these efforts will allow us to continue to work collaboratively to ensure that, in the words of Attorney General Loretta Lynch, there is “no price tag on justice.”

Sincerely,



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