

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/the-high-price-of-using-justice-fines-and-fees-to-fund-government>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Fines and fees imposed by state, county, and municipal justice systems place an enormous financial burden on the people who are charged and pay them disproportionately Black and brown people and people with low incomes. People who cannot pay risk a spiraling set of consequences such as losing their drivers licenses and ultimately owing even more money if their debt is sent to private debt collectors. However, for all the harm caused, revenue collected through fines and fees typically make up a tiny fraction of government budgets.

This series of research reports details the numerous fines and fees levied by government bodies in Florida, New Mexico, New York, Virginia, and Washington State revealing the cumulative toll they take on people. As state and local governments prepare budgets that are under increased stress from the COVID-19 crisis, it is more important than ever for taxpayers to understand how their governments are profiting from the collection of fines and fees.

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