

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/past-due-costs-consequences-charging-for-justice-new-orleans>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

In 2015, government agencies in New Orleans collected \$4.5 million in the form of bail, fines and fees from people involved in the criminal justice system and, by extension, from their families. Another \$4.7 million was transferred from the pockets of residents to for-profit bail bond agents. These costs have become the subject of considerable public attention. Because many users of the system have very low incomes or none at all, there is growing concern that charging for justice amounts to criminalizing poverty, especially when people who can't pay become further entangled in the justice system. In 2015, the city spent \$6.4 million to incarcerate people who couldn't pay bail or conviction fines and fees. By focusing on bail decisions and fines and fees assessed at conviction, *Past Due*, and its accompanying technical report, reveal the costs and other consequences of a system that tries to extract money from low-income people and then jails them when they can't pay.

In New Orleans, as in many cities around the country, nearly every phase of the criminal justice system imposes a financial cost on the users of that system, even before they are convicted of a crime. These costs take a steep toll on the people they impact, often including jail time, and on the city and taxpayers who bear the cost of that incarceration.

Bail, fines and fees are not calibrated to reflect a person's ability to pay, which means poor defendants risk getting further entangled in the criminal justice system.

When people can't pay, they often spend time in jail. This incarceration costs the city more than the revenue criminal justice agencies collect from bail, fines and fees.

Defendants and their families paid over \$9 million in 2015 in bail, fines and fees. This represents an enormous transfer of wealth from primarily poor, black communities to government agencies and the for-profit bail bond industry.

VIDEO

VIDEO

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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