



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1199:

Workgroup to Study the Impact of Court-Mandated Fines and Fees

TO: Hon. Luke Clippinger, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: **Nicole Hanson-Mundell, Executive Director of Out for Justice, Inc.**

DATE: March 2nd, 2022

Out for Justice, Inc. (OFJ) is an organization led by individuals who are both directly and indirectly impacted by the criminal justice system. We advocate for the reform of policies and practices that adversely affect successful reintegration into society. We accomplish our mission through the three E's: 1) ENGAGE formerly incarcerated individuals, families and friends through grassroots outreach and community events; 2) EDUCATE our member base and communities on the policies and practices impacting our communities and navigating the legislative process for reform; 3) EMPOWER those impacted by the criminal justice system to utilize their voices and experiences to enact tangible change.

Out for Justice strongly supports House Bill 1199 as a means to study the devastating impact of criminal justice-related fines and fees for lower-income communities in Maryland.

In 2018, JOTF released a report called "[The Criminalization of Poverty](#)" which dissects the pathways in which Maryland residents from impoverished communities unjustly encounter the Criminal Justice System. Part II of the report goes forward to outline how extensive fines and fees related to interactions with the criminal justice system impoverish Marylanders, specifically lower-income communities of color.

Marylanders from low-income communities, especially communities of color, find themselves often strapped with gratuitous criminal-justice-related debts. These "fees for service" include court-related fees (administrative, jury, and restitution), home detention, parole and probation, public defender representation (application and reimbursement), jail room and board (especially for pretrial), mandatory drug and alcohol testing, vehicle interlock devices, criminal record expungement, as well as interest and late fees from the Central Collections Unit (CCU). The goal of fees is often to recoup costs and generate revenue. In 2018, Alexis Harris, a sociologist at the University of Washington, estimates that 80-85% of incarcerated persons now leaving prison owe criminal justice costs. This is estimated to amount to some 10 million Americans who owe more than \$50 billion in criminal justice debt. They serve to further impoverish already indigent individuals leaving them in a spiral of debt. As of yet, there is no collection of data that explicitly spells out how much Marylanders owe in criminal justice debt. Thus, House Bill 1199 seeks to study the impact of the following:

- District and Circuit Court Fees
- Criminal Cases - Filing Fees: \$80
- Criminal Cases - Conviction Costs: \$45
- Expungement (Guilty Dispositions & Appeals):
- Court Removals: \$60 - \$165
- Public defender applications: \$25 to \$50
- Pre-trial electronic monitoring: \$300+ monthly
- Public defender reimbursement: >\$1,000
- Healthcare and medication fees while incarcerated
- Room and board for work release: \$135 weekly
- Parole & Probation fees: \$40-\$50 monthly
- Drug and Alcohol testing: \$100 initial fee; \$6 for each random test
- Records request: \$18
- Central Collections - 17% average

Given that Maryland's criminal justice system disproportionately (and at many times unnecessarily) burdens lower-income communities of color, House Bill 1199 is a step towards understanding how damaging the majority of financial debts arising from court-related fines and fees are. We are creating this workgroup to



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examine the above fees with the purpose of learning the impact that these fees are having on indigent communities, especially communities of color. For these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 1199.

Sincerely,

Nicole Hanson-Mundell
Executive Director
Out for Justice, Inc