
Kimberly Haven

January 23, 2023

Chairman Luke Clippinger
Vice Chairman David Moon
House Judiciary Committee

House Bill 0154–
Workgroup to Study the Impact of Court-Mandated Fines and Fees
POSITION: FAVORABLE
Interfaith Action for Human Rights

Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kimberly Haven, and I am the Legislative Liaison for Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR). IAHR represents people of faith who educate and advocate in Maryland, DC and Virginia for corrections systems that avoid unnecessarily punitive practices such as solitary confinement and that instead focus on rehabilitation and successful reentry and that minimizes the use of corrections by addressing the need for economic opportunity, education, and healthcare for all.

We strongly support HB 154. This workgroup will study the devastating impact of criminal justice-related fines and fees that plague lower-income communities in Maryland. Given that our criminal justice system disproportionately burdens lower-income communities of color HB 154 will be a major step towards understanding just how damaging the majority of financial debts arising from court-related fines and fees are in our communities.

Our current system has become a debtor's prison which is illegal under section 38 of the Maryland Constitution. These court-mandated fees can deny the ability of low and middle-income Marylanders the ability to access economic security and only serves to keep these citizens trapped in poverty. Additionally, they serve as an ever-present threat of legal jeopardy if they are not paid.

We cannot accurately assess the devastating impact and this legislation will enable us to know the impact that these fees are having on indigent communities, especially communities of color.

The time is right for Maryland to form this Workgroup and undertake this study, which would not only look at the various issues and questions in detail, but also add to the national conversation on court-mandated fees and fines.

For these reasons and on behalf of our organization and members, we ***urge a favorable report on HB 0154.***

Respectfully submitted,

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