



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 154

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

House Judiciary Committee

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Submitted by Kali Schumitz and Mark Huffman, Co-Chairs

#### Member Agencies:

211 Maryland

Baltimore Jewish Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Energy Advocates

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

Fuel Fund of Maryland

Job Opportunities Task Force

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,  
Inc.

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Loyola University Maryland

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Community Action  
Partnership

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Paul's Place

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Welfare Advocates

#### Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith groups, and other organizations working together to advocate for statewide public policy and programs that help Marylanders living in or near poverty. **MAP strongly supports House Bill 154** as a means to study the devastating impact of criminal justice-related fines and fees for lower-income communities in Maryland.

Criminal justice debt is a significant burden for low-income individuals, and specifically impacts this population given the cumulative effects of policies that criminalize poverty. State and local governments impose fines and fees on everything from traffic violations to felonies, and assess exorbitant fees even when an individual may not be found liable or guilty of an offense. For example, in Baltimore County, pre-trial detention electronic monitoring fees can range from \$300 to \$500 a month - for individuals who have not been found guilty of any crime. Fines and fees for even a single incident can add up to thousands of dollars, and those unable to pay these sums may face other consequences such as driver's license suspensions, or the loss of a job or home amongst others. In this way, court mandated fines and fees reinforce a two-tiered system in which justice is placed out of reach of low-income individuals.

Currently, very little is known about the extent of criminal justice fines and fees - the number of individuals they impact, the collective burden they impose, the total amounts collected by and how they are used by various agencies and municipal, county, and state authorities. What we do know is alarming. The National Center for Access to Justice convened a task force of experts from around the country to study this issue, and rated Maryland at 35/100 points on seventeen policy benchmarks. Maryland received excellent marks on abolition of juvenile court fees and fines and on barring courts from using private collection firms, but received a score of zero on assessing willful failure to pay, on using codified standards, on providing payment plan options, and more.

Before Maryland can begin the process of moving towards creating policies that are equitable and do not unjustly place additional burdens of people living in poverty, the state must have comprehensive data that gives a full picture of the extent of the problem. House Bill 154 is the first step towards understanding the problem so that we can begin proposing solutions that address the issue in the most effective and equitable manner.

**MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 154.**

*Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.*