

MYTHS: COURT FINES + FEES IN ILLINOIS

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Several myths dominate public policy conversations around court costs, administrative fees, and fines.

MYTH 1:

"COURTS WILL FAIL WITHOUT FUNDING FROM FINES + FEES."

As we gather more empirical evidence, we learn just how high the costs of collection and administration are for the courts.

FACT: COLLECTING FINES AND FEES CAN ACTUALLY END UP COSTING THE COURT.

There are significant time requirements and labor costs for the court in assessing and collecting fines and fees.

MYTH 2:

"FINES AND COURT FEES SUPPORT PUBLIC SAFETY."

Court debts are devastating and primarily harm lower-income communities, Black and Brown families, and individuals newly released from incarceration - hurting marginalized communities most and undermining public trust in the legal system, which actually worsens public safety.

FACT: COURT DEBTS DO NOT "DETER" CRIME.

Instead, they can make finding housing and sustainable employment more difficult, which could actually increase someone's likelihood to eventually recidivate.

MYTH 3:

"COURT COSTS ARE FAIR (THE SAME FOR EVERYONE)."

Wealthy people pay their fines or fees and are done with their system involvement, suffering no significant consequences to their lives or livelihood, while lower-income people face severe long-term socioeconomic consequences.

FACT: UNDER THE OLD SYSTEM, FINES + FEES FOR THE SAME OFFENSE VARIED WIDELY ACROSS COUNTIES + COURTROOMS.

The new system creates clearer standards but does not erase the fact that the impact of a \$300 fine or fee for a doctor is not equivalent to the impact of a \$300 fine or fee for a home healthcare worker.

MYTH 4:

"FINES ARE A SOURCE OF RESTITUTION FOR CRIME VICTIMS."

Fines and fees create new victims of the criminal legal system itself. People who cannot pay get trapped in a cycle of unconstitutional punishments that go far beyond what is appropriate for the alleged offense committed.

FACT: THERE ARE WAYS TO COMPENSATE VICTIMS UNRELATED TO CURRENT COLLECTION PRACTICES.

Illinois has other legal + financial means to compensate victims, so eliminating fines and fees need not change victims restitution practices.