

END JAIL TIME FOR UNPAID FINES IN TEXAS

Jail for Fines Wastes Taxpayer Dollars and Harms Public Safety

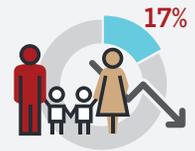
Fine-only offenses, such as traffic tickets and city ordinance violations, are misdemeanors that are intended by Texas law to be punishable by only a fine and no jail time. These cases are handled by municipal and justice courts.



Courts Fail to Use Alternatives to Fines

Courts are not employing alternative ways, such as community service, to hold Texans who are unable to pay fines accountable. Alternative ways to satisfy fines are essential because...

More than 17% of Texans live below the poverty line (i.e. an income of less than \$24,300 for a family of four) and lack the money to pay fines and court costs.

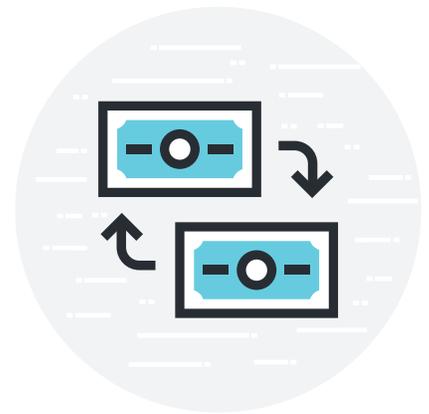


In 2015, community service was used to resolve fines and costs in only 1.3% of all fine-only cases statewide; fines and court costs were waived or reduced for indigency in less than 1% of all cases.

The System Traps Texans in a Cycle of Debt

Inability to pay fines and court costs leads to an inescapable cycle of debt. When people cannot renew their driver's licenses or vehicle registrations due to unpaid tickets, they continue to accumulate more tickets for driving without a valid license or registration.

More than 230,000 Texans currently cannot renew their licenses due to unpaid fines, making it illegal to drive to work.



Another 370,000 holds have been placed on vehicle registrations due to unpaid fines.

Warrants for Unpaid Fines Hurt Texans' Job Opportunities



In 2015, Texas courts issued 2.9 million warrants in fine-only cases, including 754,000 warrants specifically for failure to pay fines.

Courts issue millions of warrants when people don't pay their fines or fail to appear in court, often for reasons like not being able to take time off work or fear of being jailed. More than 95 percent of all arrest warrants issued in 2015 were for fine-only misdemeanors. Warrants prevent people from being hired for better jobs and cause them to live in fear of contacting law enforcement to report more serious crimes. Warrants for unpaid fines also waste law enforcement's time, taking them away from patrol while they book low-risk people in jail.

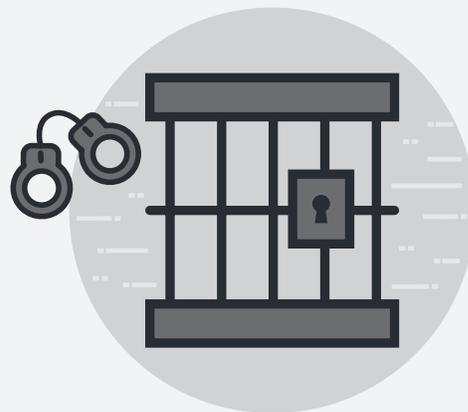
Jail Time for Unpaid Fines Hurts Everyone

Fines and court costs in 1 in 8 cases are paid through jail stays statewide. In 2014, more than **24,000** individuals were booked in jail for nothing more than a fine-only offense in **seven** Texas counties alone.



More than 600 jail bookings in these seven counties lasted longer than 10 days for charges that are supposed to be punished by only a fine.

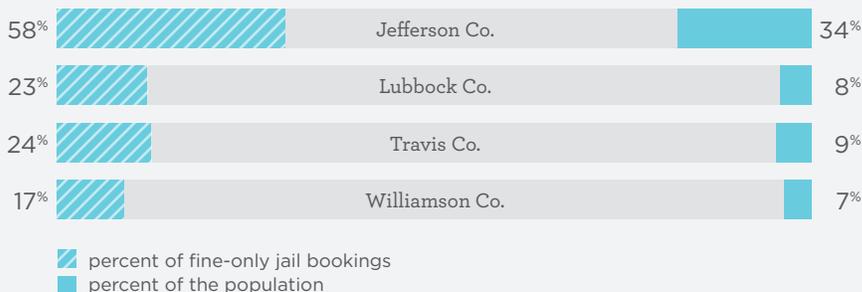
Jail time for low-risk individuals, whose only offense is not paying fines, can have a major negative impact on their lives, causing them to lose employment and housing and increasing their risk of committing more serious crimes when they exit jail, putting everyone's safety at risk.



Racial Disparities Undermine Public Trust



Texans who are African American go to jail at a disproportionate rate for fine-only offenses.



Texas Legislators Should:

- ✓ Require judges to determine people's ability to pay fines and costs at the time they are imposed.
- ✓ Reduce the number of warrants in fine-only cases by providing notice to defendants of court dates and the alternatives available to them.
- ✓ Instruct judges to immediately consider alternatives to full payment for people who are unable to pay, and make community service more widely available.
- ✓ End commitments to jail for failure to pay fines and court costs.

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