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## Roundup of San Francisco Actions to Alleviate the Burden of Government Fines, Fees, and Collections During the COVID-19 Health Crisis

*Department and Court Actions Provide Relief to Low-Income People Disproportionately Impacted by Fines & Fees*

In response to the COVID-19 health crisis, many City and County of San Francisco departments are acting to alleviate the impact of fines, fees, and collections on low-income residents hardest hit by this crisis. Departments are taking these steps to stem the harms of the public health and economic crisis and ensure that fines and fees are not an additional barrier to people's basic needs throughout this emergency.

"In this unprecedented health crisis, we don't want San Franciscans worrying about paying fines and fees," said San Francisco Mayor London Breed. "People are losing their jobs. We know they need every dollar they have to make ends meet, and we are taking these immediate actions to prevent further economic harms."

"Now is the time to do everything we can to strengthen families that are struggling," said Treasurer José Cisneros, who founded the [Financial Justice Project](#) that has worked with city departments to eliminate or adjust dozens of fees and fines that have a disproportionate and adverse impact. "We know that fines and fees can hit people with lower incomes and people of color particularly hard. I'm proud of our efforts to alleviate these burdens on families in crisis. I hope San Francisco's actions inspire other cities to do the same."

These are challenging times for all San Franciscans, and doubly so for people living paycheck to paycheck and at the hardest edges of our economy. Forty-six percent of families in San Francisco are [economically insecure](#), according to the Urban Institute, meaning that they have less than \$2,000 in savings. We know that families who were already struggling will be hit the hardest by the layoffs, wage cuts, and health issues stemming from the pandemic. People's limited financial reserves are now more depleted. The City is stepping up to ensure fines and fees do not add to low-income residents' burden, and that families can direct their dollars where they are needed most.

San Francisco leaders are cognizant that during the last recession, many state and local governments dramatically increased their reliance on fines and fees to fill budget gaps. There is no doubt that the City and County of San Francisco will face budget deficits. But so will families across our city, and none more than low-income people and communities of color. From our three years of experience advancing reforms through the Financial Justice Project, we know now more than ever that balancing government budgets on the backs of low-income residents of color is inequitable, unfair, and ultimately ineffective.

Below we list a roundup of actions departments and the courts are taking in response to the crisis to alleviate the burden of fines, fees, financial penalties, and collections. Some of these actions have been previously announced in [press releases](#) from the San Francisco Mayor's office. This list may grow in the coming weeks. We will continue to update it.

**San Francisco Treasurer's Office.** Visit the Treasurer's Offices' [Help Center](#) if you have questions about the following temporary actions taken by the Treasurer's Office:

- **Collections:** The Treasurer's Office has stopped the following activities for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis: post-judgment collections (for example, bank levy and wage garnishments), small courts claims filings, summary judgments, citation issuance, and property tax auctions. The Treasurer's Office, in

conjunction with the San Francisco Department of Public Health and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA) is, on a temporary basis, suspending the collection of certain debt owed to Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and the SFMTA.

- **Property Taxes:** As the San Francisco shelter-in-place order has been extended and in accordance with state law, the new property tax deadline is May 4, 2020 (the first business day after the shelter-in-place order is lifted). Taxpayers who are unable to pay by this date for reasons related to COVID-19 should submit a request for a [penalty waiver](#) request online. Please note that penalty waiver requests will not be accepted until after the property tax deadline. See additional [Frequently Asked Questions here](#).
- **Small business taxes and fees:** Working with the Mayor's Office, the Treasurer's Office will [defer taxes and license fees for certain businesses](#).

**San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency.** In addition to existing discounts for low-income people who receive [parking citations](#), or who are [towed](#) or [booted](#), the SFMTA has implemented numerous temporary relief actions in response to the health crisis. More information on these temporary discounts and reforms are [here](#).

- **Parking Enforcement.** Throughout the duration of the shelter-in-place order, The SFMTA will continue to enforce parking rules that impact health and safety. The SFMTA will not be ticketing for street cleaning, although they ask people to move their car for street cleaning, so that streets may still be cleaned to prevent trash build up and local flooding. Also, the SFMTA will not be issuing parking citations to enforce the 72-hour parking limit; all time limit parking (i.e. 2 hour limit) and for Residential Permit Parking permits. Parking meters throughout the city will be 50 cents an hour, and will not have time limits.
- **Towing.** Throughout the duration of the shelter-in-place order, towing will be limited to tows for public safety and to ensure traffic flow. The SFMTA will not be towing for violation of the 72-hour limit, peak hour tow away zones, or for unpaid citations or expired registration
- **Fine and Fees.** Until further notice the SFMTA will take the following the actions:
  - Suspend new late penalties on citations
  - Extend deadlines for submitting [citation protests](#)
  - Extend citation/boot/tow hearings deadlines – you may request 48-hour tow hearing at [hearingsgeneral@sfmta.com](mailto:hearingsgeneral@sfmta.com) or call 415.503.8453
  - Extend deadlines for active community service programs
  - Extend deadlines for completing active payment plans
  - No longer forward additional delinquent citations to the Department of Motor Vehicles or Special Collections

**San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.** Starting March 14, 2020, the SF PUC is suspending the following actions for sixty days. Please visit the SF PUC's [website](#) for more information:

- The discontinuation or shut off of water service for residents and businesses in San Francisco for non-payment of water and sewer bills,
- The imposition of late payment penalties or fees for delinquent water and/or sewer bills,
- The discontinuation or shut off of power service for SFPUC Hetch Hetchy Power Customers in San Francisco for non-payment of power bills,
- The imposition of late payment penalties or fees for delinquent Hetch Hetchy Power Customer accounts, and
- The return of delinquent CleanPowerSF Customers to PG&E generation service for failure to pay CleanPowerSF charges.

**San Francisco Superior Court.** The Court will allow for a 60-day suspension of collections for people on payment plans for people who call and indicate that the pandemic has impacted their ability to meet their payment plan

obligations. To ask for an extension, call Alliance One at 866-897-5349. Traffic ticket payment timelines have also been extended. If you get a citation today, the due date has been extended 60 days, in addition to the original 21-day grace period. Furthermore, anyone can request a discount on their traffic ticket based on their ability to pay, even if their traffic ticket is past-due. The court recently launched a new, online tool for people to request a discount on their past-due tickets. To apply for the discount online, visit the [MyCitations website](#). More information is available on the San Francisco Superior Court's Can't Afford To Pay [webpage](#). The Judicial Council, the head of California Courts, also issued [new rules](#) for court cases in California during COVID-19. The rules effectively suspend most evictions during the period of the Covid-19 State of Emergency.

**San Francisco Sheriff's Department.** To protect against COVID-19, all visits are currently suspended for people incarcerated in the San Francisco jail. Realizing that anxious family members will want to keep in touch with their incarcerated loved ones throughout the health crisis, the Sheriff's department is speeding up the implementation of [reforms](#) to make phone calls from jail free and end commissary markups. Starting this week, The Sheriff's department will now provide 75 minutes of free phone calls every week to people incarcerated in the jails. This summer, all jail phone calls will be free. Effective immediately, the Sheriff's Department will no longer take a commission on items in the jail store, and prices will decrease by an average of 43%.

**San Francisco Department of Child Support Services.** California Child Support Services is now temporarily stopping the automatic placement of bank levies and suspension of drivers' licenses, effective on March 17, 2020. During this time of crisis, the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services recognizes that the need for financial support for children will continue, and that parents may have lost wages or are worrying about missing payments. The San Francisco Department of Child Support Services recognizes that many low-income parents may have trouble repaying the government for the cost of public assistance through making their child support payments during this crisis. If you are unable to pay child support due to quarantine, self-isolation or layoffs, your first step is to request a "review and adjustment," also called a "modification." If you and the other parent can agree, we can help you stipulate to change your child support order for the duration of this emergency. Please call 1 -866-901-3212 for more information or visit California Child Support Services [here](#) for current information regarding our COVID-19 response.

**San Francisco Public Library.** All materials due from February 1, 2020 through April 30, 2020 are now due on June 1, 2020. As of September 2019, San Francisco Public Library is [fine free](#)—no late fees will accrue on your account.

**Other Fine and Fee Discounts for Low-Income San Franciscans.** It is especially important during these difficult times that people are aware of San Francisco's existing fine and fee discounts for low-income residents. A [guide](#) to these discounts, including who is eligible, and how to access them, is available on the Treasurer's office's [Financial Justice Project website](#). People with low-incomes can find out how to access discounts on [traffic tickets](#), [tow](#) or [boot fees](#), [utility bill](#), and many more. Many fines and fees have been eliminated. Others have discounts for low-income people based on their ability to pay. There are also accessible nonmonetary ways for people to resolve their obligations through performing community service or even through receiving social services, for especially vulnerable populations.

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