



***** PRESS RELEASE: SAN FRANCISCO TO BECOME FIRST COUNTY IN THE NATION TO ELIMINATE ALL LOCALLY CONTROLLED FEES ASSESSED FROM PEOPLE EXITING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM*****

The Financial Justice Project releases new report: Criminal Justice Administrative Fees: High Pain for People, Low Gain for Government

May 22, 2018— On Tuesday, May 22, The San Francisco Board of Supervisors will consider an [ordinance](#) sponsored by Board President London Breed to eliminate all locally controlled fees assessed from people exiting jail or the criminal justice system, and call for the elimination of outstanding debt from these criminal justice fees. Today, the Financial Justice Project is releasing a report: [Criminal Justice Administrative Fees: High Pain for People, Low Gain For Government](#).

“These fees are high pain for people, but low gain for government,” said Treasurer José Cisneros. “They are assessed on low income people who cannot pay them and create barriers for people re-entering their communities. Only a fraction of these fees is ever collected, and I challenge other counties to join San Francisco in stopping the practice of balancing our books on the backs of people who cannot afford it.”

The Financial Justice Project collaborated with the Public Defender’s Office and Mayors Budget Office to research the fiscal and human impacts of these fees. The new report is co-authored by Christa Brown and Anne Stuhldreher in the Financial Justice Project and Donna Mandel in the San Francisco Public Defender’s Office.

Some of our key findings and conclusions include:

- **People exiting the criminal justice system can be assessed dozens of fines and fees that can add up to thousands of dollars.** At least 45 fines and fees can be assessed from people exiting our local criminal justice system, approximately 30 of which are administrative fees. Some are assessed by the county, and others by the courts or state government.
- **Over the last six years, more than 265,000 fines and fees have been charged to local individuals, totaling almost \$57 million.** Of this total, more than \$20 million of these fines and fees are locally controlled and authorized by the City and County of San Francisco.
- **Over the last six years, over 20,000 individuals have accumulated more than \$15 million in unpaid debt from locally authorized fees.** This legislation calls for the elimination of this outstanding debt.
- **The collection rates on these fees are very low,** averaging seventeen percent across these locally authorized fees, simply because people cannot afford to pay them.

- **Monthly \$50 probation fees result in the most debt and appear to be the hardest for people to pay.** In San Francisco, individuals are charged a monthly \$50 probation fee. Typically, the entire cost of the average three-year probation supervision term is billed to the individual upfront at the beginning of their probation, totaling \$1,800. A total of \$15.8 million in probation fees has been assessed in the last six years. Of the \$15.8 million, more than \$12 million is still uncollected. In 2016, the collection rate for probation fees was nine percent.
- **The cost of this legislation will be outweighed by the benefits.** The Mayor’s Budget Office estimates that elimination of these criminal justice administrative fees will cost one million dollars a year in foregone revenue, spread across several City departments. Eliminating this liability will lift \$15 million in debt off thousands of individuals, most of whom are very low income. This debt makes it harder to meet their day to day living expenses and is a barrier to their successful re-entry.

Background: When individuals exit jail or the criminal justice system, they are often assessed thousands of dollars in administrative fees that aim to recoup costs for the courts and government. For example, in San Francisco people can be charged a \$50 monthly probation fee; up to \$35 a day to rent an electronic ankle surveillance monitor, and other fees to pay for reports, collections costs, or tests. The fees can add up to thousands of dollars.

The ten San Francisco criminal justice administrative fees targeted for elimination by this legislation are assessed on individuals who have already paid other consequences for their crimes. They have often served time in jail, paid other fines or are paying victim restitution. The goals of these local criminal justice fees are to generate revenue to cover costs, not create an additional layer of punishment.

Other Financial Justice Project recent updates: San Francisco is the first city in the nation to launch a [Financial Justice Project](#) to assess and reform how fees and fines impact our cities’ most vulnerable residents. Located in the office of San Francisco Treasurer José Cisneros, the Financial Justice Project coordinated a countywide fines and fees task force and put forward [reforms](#) across six policy areas. Recently, we collaborated with San Francisco City and County departments to:

- **Make it easier for low income San Franciscans to pay MTA citations they cannot afford.** March 1 the SFMTA began offering a new payment plan for low income people, eliminated and reduced fees to perform community service to clear citations, and started a three-month grace period to allow low-income people to bring in old citations and get the late fees waived. Since then 400% more people have signed up for payment plans. See our [announcement of the reforms here](#) and a recent [SFMTA blog](#)
- **Eliminate SFPUC fees for people whose water has been shut off.** Approximately three people a day have their water shutoff in San Francisco, often because they cannot pay their bills. Previously people would need to pay \$110 in water shut-off and water turn-on fees. Starting July 1, these fees will be eliminated.

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- **Ease the burden of towing and boot fees for low-income San Franciscans.** The SFMTA cut towing and boot fees for low income San Franciscans. San Francisco towing and boot fees can exceed \$500 and be very difficult for lower income people to pay. The SFMTA Board voted on May 15 to: 1) eliminate the \$261 admin fee for people below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line 2) Create a low-income boot discount--\$100 instead of \$505 3) Allows tickets to be paid over time in a payment plan or by performing community service. See our announcement [here](#).

About The Financial Justice Project

San Francisco is the first city in the nation to launch a Financial Justice Project to assess and reform how fees and fines impact our cities' most vulnerable residents.

Too often government programs and courts levy fines and fees on people, partly to generate revenue to balance public budgets. There is often an insidious unintended impact of this practice---to push people into poverty. These fines and fees can knock people down so hard they can't get back up. Poor people and people of color are usually hit the hardest. These financial penalties can make government a driver of inequality, not an equalizer.

The Financial Justice Project was launched in November 2016 with the publication of an [op-ed in the San Francisco Chronicle](#). The Financial Justice Project is housed in the Office of Treasurer & Tax Collector, the entity in charge of revenue collection for the City and County.

Together we work with community organizations, advocates, city and county departments, and the courts to enact reforms that result in meaningful change for low-income San Franciscans

About Treasurer José Cisneros

José Cisneros is the Treasurer for the City and County of San Francisco. As Treasurer, he serves as the City's banker and chief investment officer, managing all tax and revenue collection for San Francisco. Treasurer Cisneros believes that his role of safeguarding the City's money extends to all San Francisco residents, and continues to expand his role as a financial educator and advocate for low-income San Franciscans through award-winning programs like Kindergarten to College and Bank On San Francisco. Cisneros was a member of the FDIC's Advisory Committee on Economic Inclusion, served as Vice Chair on the President's Advisory Council on Financial Capability for Young Americans, and is the Co-Chair of the Cities for Financial Empowerment Coalition.

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