

Danielle Valerio

Regarding HB 3825

3/14/2025

My name is Danielle Valerio and I am an Oregon resident and a legal assistant at the Metropolitan Public Defenders Inc. in the Community Law Department. Our division works with clients who are facing barriers due to having criminal legal involvement. I am testifying regarding the widespread harm fines and fees cause to justice involved individuals and therefore testifying in support of HB 3825.

The nature of my job allows me to work with individuals who have come in contact with the legal system in some capacity at some point in their life. While involvement with the criminal legal system can vary significantly, one thing that does not vary is the short and long-term harm fines and fees cause to both our clients and others who are unable to get assistance through our program. Speaking with these clients daily emphasizes the hardships they face when owing court fines and fees on anything from traffic citations to criminal cases. On a weekly basis, I speak with clients who must choose between providing food for their families, paying rent, purchasing needed medical supplies, or paying court fines and fees. For clients in this situation, it is often an obvious choice: Keeping themselves and their families healthy and sheltered. The work I do reminds me that individuals are making these hard choices every single day. While court fines and fees are meant to be in place to hold clients accountable, this form of punishment causes persistent and long term harm to individuals and their families.

The effect of court fines and fees is all encompassing: These fees cause short- and long-term financial insecurity and physical and mental health issues to clients. These fines and fees perpetuate cycles of poverty by creating a disadvantage to those who have been justice involved and disproportionately affect clients who are already experiencing poverty<sup>1</sup>. Court debt can cause further harm to clients, including license suspension, being held in contempt, or even further monetary consequences like collections fees or interest, adding on even more debt that the client could not pay in the first place. The collateral consequences of fines and fees push clients further into poverty by proving it harder to seek meaningful employment, lacking reliable transportation, and creating housing

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<sup>1</sup> Menendez, Matthew, et al. 2019, *The Steep Costs of Criminal Justice Fees and Fines: A Fiscal Analysis of Three States and Ten Counties*, [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019\\_10\\_Fees%26Fines\\_Final4.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019_10_Fees%26Fines_Final4.pdf).

insecurity due to competing debts, further prohibiting them from paying the fees implemented in the first place. Seeing individuals stuck in this cycle while trying to better their lives has inspired me to testify in support of this consequential bill.

While these fines and fees currently stick around for years and sometimes decades, data shows that the older the debt the less likely it is to be paid<sup>2</sup>. Continuing to attempt to collect these older fines and fees costs both the state (financially) and the defendant (opportunistically). Allowing shorter waiting times for court debt to fall off would assist in lifting the burdens debt collection causes to both individuals and the state.

While I could share countless individual's stories of how court debt negatively affected them, the fact that I hear these stories on a weekly and even daily basis speaks volumes. The impact of court fines and fees is widespread and is actively forcing families to choose between basic necessities and making payments on court fines to prevent further sanctions. Seeing the firsthand impacts of this cycle of poverty pushes me to support HB3825.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my written testimony,

Danielle Valerio

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<sup>2</sup> Menendez, Matthew, et al. 2019, *The Steep Costs of Criminal Justice Fees and Fines: A Fiscal Analysis of Three States and Ten Counties*, [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019\\_10\\_Fees%26Fines\\_Final4.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019_10_Fees%26Fines_Final4.pdf).