

April 7, 2020

North Carolina Sheriff's Association
President, Sheriff John W. Ingram, V
P.O. Box 9
Bolivia, NC 28422
sheriffingram@gmail.com

North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police
Chief David Hess
Roxboro Police Department
109 N Lamar St.
Roxboro, NC 27573
dhess@cityofroxboro.com

Via U.S. Mail and Email

RE: Law Enforcement Recommendations for Criminal Monetary Obligations During COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Sheriff Ingram and Chief House:

We are writing to you as members of the North Carolina Fines and Fees Coalition, which has been working for years to lessen the crushing burden placed upon the poorest of our citizens by the ever-increasing fines, fees and penalties imposed by the courts of North Carolina in criminal and traffic cases. Not surprisingly, the impact of the current coronavirus pandemic is falling most heavily on the same people who are most harmed by the excessive imposition of fines fees and penalties -- those who are living paycheck-to-paycheck, who are so often entangled in the criminal legal system, and who are disproportionately from communities of color.

Starting with the Governor, North Carolina leaders at the state, county and municipal levels have acted quickly and decisively to meet this ongoing crisis by taking steps to ameliorate the potentially disastrous impact of the ongoing pandemic. We are writing to ask you to join in this effort by undertaking efforts to mitigate the harm visited upon our most vulnerable citizens.

It is a very uncertain time physically and financially for many individuals and families who live in this great state. Prior to the Coronavirus crisis and according to US Census data, approximately 14% of North Carolinians lived in poverty. This crisis will be significantly more burdensome for those who were already experiencing financial hardship in their households.



As part of our communities, law enforcement officials play an important role. You are tasked with maintaining order and the rule of law in our communities and as well as with educating and protecting *all* people in the communities you serve. This role carries even more vigilance and responsibility during a critical time in our state. It is important that our state avoid exacerbating the issue of poverty and protect those who are most vulnerable, recognizing that many more North Carolinians will experience financial hardships during this time.

On behalf of the NC Fines and Fees Coalition, we are asking that your organizations make a recommendation to all law enforcement officials to avoid exacerbating financial hardships experienced by North Carolinians by:

- 1. Issuing warnings or cite and release those that are found to be driving on suspended licenses;*
- 2. Releasing all individuals who are incarcerated for outstanding fines and fees, or being detained because they cannot afford cash bail;*
- 3. Providing free soap, CDC- approved hand sanitizer, and other disinfecting products to people incarcerated in county jails;*
- 4. Providing free and regularly accessible phone and email communication to people incarcerated in county jails; and*
- 5. Waiving all co-pays for medical visits of people incarcerated in the county jails*

With the COVID-19 pandemic at hand, and the country and state on the brink of a major economic downturn, now is the time for law enforcement officials to focus on protecting our communities.

Sincerely,

THE NORTH CAROLINA FINES AND FEES COALITION

Daryl Atkinson

Co-Director
Forward Justice

Chantal Stevens

Interim Executive Director
ACLU of North Carolina

Kristen Powers

Interim Executive Director
Benevolence Farm

Daniel Bowes

Director
NC Justice Center, Fair Chance Project

Don Cavellini

Co-Chair
Coalition Against Racism

James E. Williams, Jr.

Attorney