

ASK THE CANDIDATES 2022: CRIMINAL JUSTICE DEBT



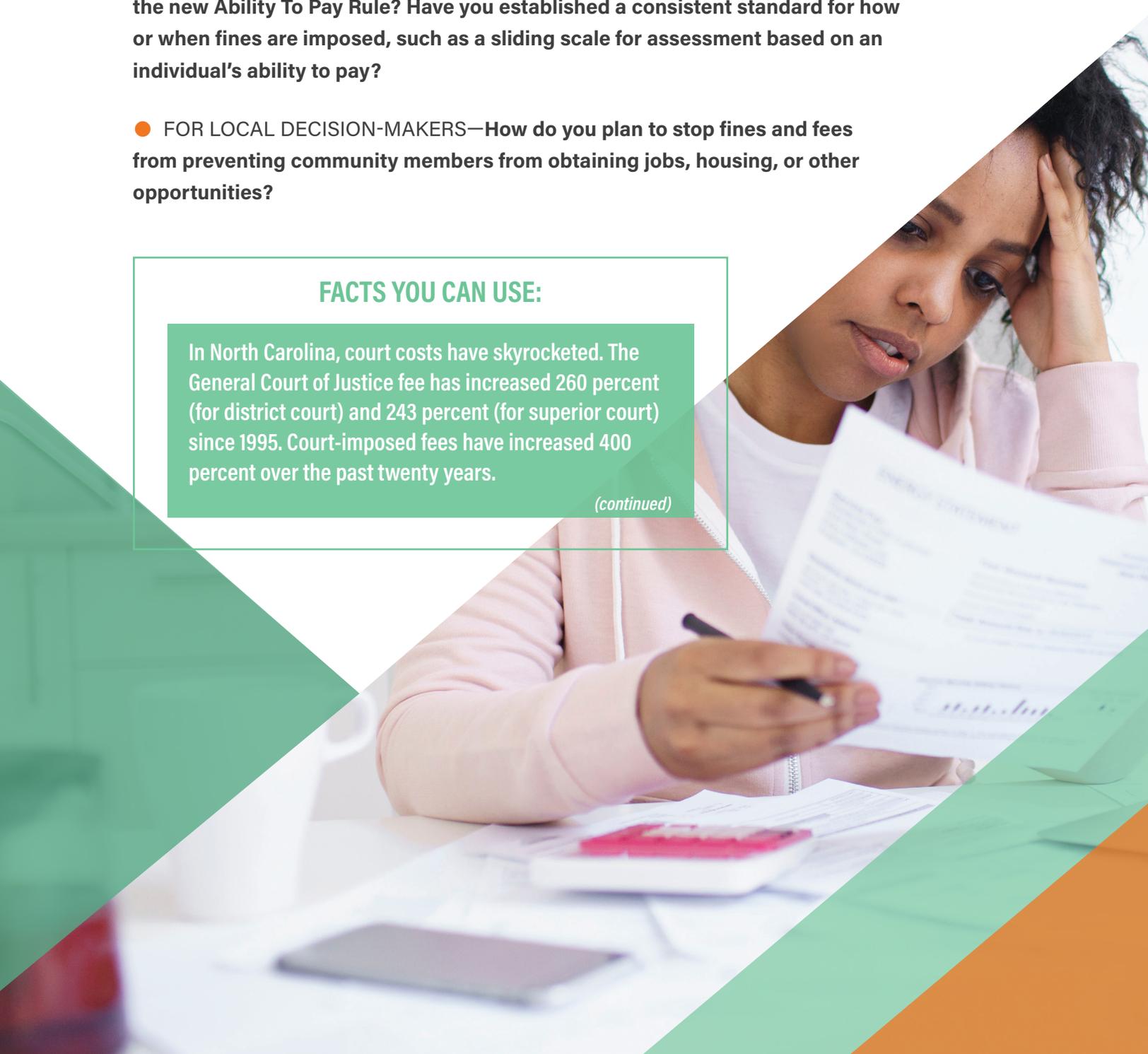
“What will you do to help end criminal justice debt in North Carolina?”

- FOR COURT ACTORS—What is your plan to ensure that your jurisdiction follows the new Ability To Pay Rule? Have you established a consistent standard for how or when fines are imposed, such as a sliding scale for assessment based on an individual’s ability to pay?
- FOR LOCAL DECISION-MAKERS—How do you plan to stop fines and fees from preventing community members from obtaining jobs, housing, or other opportunities?

FACTS YOU CAN USE:

In North Carolina, court costs have skyrocketed. The General Court of Justice fee has increased 260 percent (for district court) and 243 percent (for superior court) since 1995. Court-imposed fees have increased 400 percent over the past twenty years.

(continued)



FACTS YOU CAN USE:

Court costs criminalize people for being poor. Poor people are still regularly incarcerated because they cannot pay their court debts, even though federal law banned debtor's prison in the United States in 1833. Poor people also face other consequences for non-payment, such as suspension of their driver's licenses and extension of probation.

People impacted by court costs are not getting the relief they need. Judges have the authority to waive court costs; however, judges only waive costs in about 8 percent of cases statewide.

The new Ability to Pay rule in North Carolina requires judges to consider all Requests For Relief From Fines, Fees, And Other Monetary Obligations (Form AOC-CR-415). Local jurisdictions should be taking steps to apply consistent policies and the practices needed to implement this rule.

Did you get a real, meaningful answer to your question?

If not, here are some follow-up questions that might help you get a more specific answer:

- Please be more specific about the actions you will take to implement your plan.
- You have mentioned ways individuals might take action to benefit themselves. Please focus your response on how you will ensure North Carolina institutions and public policies can better support those affected by fines and fees.
- Can you tell me what principles or values will guide your decisions on this issue?
- What are the problems you see in the current approach to fines and fees?

North Carolina's lawmakers can take action to ensure that community members are not trapped in an endless cycle of debt to the court system.

Visit www.ncjustice.org/election2022 to share the answers you received.



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