



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DELAWARE COURTS SUSPEND ISSUING OF FAILURE TO PAY WARRANTS, PROVIDE EMERGENCY DEBT-RELIEF DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

News Provided by the Delaware Campaign to End Debtors' Prisons, Network Delaware, ACLU of Delaware and the Delaware Coalition for Smart Justice

WILMINGTON, DE (April 13, 2020) -- Delaware State Courts have launched a new policy, in consultation with the Department of Justice, the Office of Defense Services, and other justice partners, to cease issuing capiases, or bench warrants, for failure to pay court debt from approximately March 13, 2020 to a date not yet determined. The Courts' decision comes as a response to the financial impact the novel Coronavirus pandemic has had on Delaware communities, and during the crisis all collection efforts have stopped.

As a part of ceasing the issuing of failure to pay capiases, the State Courts are also ceasing the imposition of late fees and the accruing of interest during this period. In addition, drivers' licenses will not be suspended for unpaid court debt during this time. In 2017, Delaware State Courts issued 44,889 warrants for failure to pay court debt from non-felony offenses, and 20,679 drivers' licenses were suspended for failure to pay court-ordered court debt. "[A]s more Delawareans -- especially those in lower-paying, non-salaried positions -- are impacted by shutdowns and the slowing economy, their ability to meet payments due to the courts will be affected[.]" Karen Lantz, Legal and Policy Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware, and Margaret Hu, with the Campaign to End Debtor's Prisons explained in a letter.

To contact a court regarding a previously issued capias for a failure to pay, the following phone numbers may be referenced:

Court	New Castle County	Kent County	Sussex County
Superior Court	302-255-0735	302-735-1901	302-855-7055
Family Court	302-255-0300	302-672-1000	302-855-7400
Court of Common Pleas	302-255-0900	302-735-3900	302-858-5700
Justice of the Peace	302-323-4450	302-739-4554	302-856-1445



About the Campaign to End Debtors' Prisons

The Campaign to End Debtors' Prisons is a coalition of community members through Network Delaware pushing for reform of Delaware's State Court fines and fees system. Currently, Delaware Courts impose fines and fees without consideration of someone's ability to pay. This unfairly punishes people who cannot pay hundreds of dollars in court debt. When people cannot pay their court costs, they face harsh punishments: suspended driver's licenses, arrest warrants, and even incarceration. For more information visit:

<https://www.thenetworkde.org/fines-and-fees>

About the Delaware Coalition for Smart Justice

The Delaware Coalition for Smart Justice is a statewide group of organizations and individuals who advocate for a criminal justice system that fosters public safety by reducing mass incarceration, recidivism and racial disparities. Through legislative reform, public education, community organizing and grass roots advocacy the Coalition challenges policy makers to create change that will have a significant positive impact on individuals, families and communities. For more information, visit: <https://www.aclu-de.org/en/coalition-for-smart-justice>.