



## What Can YOU Do to Help End the Criminal Justice Debt Spiral?

- **EDUCATE YOURSELF** on how bail, court fines and fees, jail fees and probation fees can lead to a debt spiral for low-income individuals, primarily people of color. Encourage others to do the same.
- **TALK TO LOCAL OFFICIALS** including District Attorneys, Judges, Sheriffs, County Commissioners and candidates for these offices.

### Possible Questions for District Attorneys and Judges:

- Are you in favor of reducing pre-trial incarceration? What is your position on ending cash bail? What is your position on electronic monitoring as an alternative to bail?
- What is your position on determining whether someone can afford to pay court fines and fees before imposing potentially harsh consequences for non-payment<sup>1</sup>, such as
  - *Revoking a driver license*
  - *Charging interest on unpaid court debt*
  - *Liens or body attachment*
  - *Converting outstanding criminal court debt to a civil judgment?*
- What is your position on eliminating or reducing fines and fees based on someone's ability to pay?
- What is your position on alternatives to fines and fees, such as community service, or participation in programs?

### Possible Questions for Sheriffs and County Commissioners

- How will you ensure that local jails and local governments are not increasing jail populations for financial gain?
  - How will you ensure that contractors with local jails are adequately meeting the needs of those detained, at a price that does not burden incarcerated persons or their loved ones?
  - Are you in favor of community-based re-entry programs? How might your office support such programs in helping formerly incarcerated persons become integrated in the workforce or otherwise equipped to be financially independent?
- **INVEST IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY**
    - Invest in existing community programs in traditionally underserved areas, particularly programs serving youth, as well as programs for families needing employment, housing and financial assistance. Ask program staff what they need and how you can help.
    - Focus on racial equity as a core value in your community work. Ask yourself "how will this program (initiative, investment, or strategy) contribute to reducing racial inequity?"<sup>2</sup>
    - Support opportunities for second chances. Consider becoming a second chance employer or supporting local re-entry groups.

<sup>1</sup> Consequences may vary by state or local jurisdiction.

<sup>2</sup> Structural Racism and Community Building, Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, June 2004.