



March 10th, 2021

Governor John Bel Edwards
Office of the Governor
PO Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: COVID-19 - Economic Justice

Dear Governor Edwards,

We want to thank you for the tremendous leadership and compassion you have shown as Governor during the COVID-19 pandemic. What we all thought would be a two-week shelter in place order turned into a year-long period of uncertainty and hardship for so many, and we want to acknowledge the challenges that have been presented to you as Governor. These challenges include the economic hardship wrought by the fines and fees people carry with them from the criminal legal system, which is why we are writing you today.

Not only have people's economic stability been impacted by COVID and related state regulations, but has their ability to pay state owed debt such as restitution, traffic violations, and other fines and fees - which are typically owed by low-income communities.

Because of these economic circumstances, we request that you immediately forgive all debts owed to state and local governments and halt the accrual of interest on any future debts that may have taken place since the pandemic started in March 2020.

As Governor, you have the statutory authority to stop such collections, and we urge you to exercise that authority during this unprecedented public health and economic emergency.

With millions of families suffering substantial hardship resulting from COVID-19, continued debt collection is not justified or within the state's interest. During the economic crisis, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to provide the legal safeguards necessary to ensure that the collection of debt is legally owed and currently due.

It's also worth noting that since the introduction of shelter in place order in March 2020 and the resulting stay at home requests over the past year, there was a drastic reduction in staffing at local and state agencies and courts that provide procedural safeguards, and people who owe debt



have severely reduced opportunities to obtain or provide evidence of the error. Collecting debt under such circumstances would likely violate basic constitutional due process protections.

We call on you to take the following actions by executive order to ensure greater economic justice and mitigate deepening financial hardship and disparities in your state:

1. Immediately halt all tax intercepts, bank levies, and wage garnishments for all outstanding government-imposed debt.
2. Immediately cease accrual of interest and the imposition of other sanctions on outstanding government-imposed debt.
3. Order counties and courts to immediately recall past referrals and stop making new referrals of outstanding government-imposed debt.
4. Order counties and courts to immediately forgive all government-imposed debt.
5. Order counties and courts immediately stop assessing any new payments or government-imposed debt and cease accrual of interest and the imposition of other sanctions on outstanding government-imposed debt.
6. Commit to not signing any legislation that would add additional monetary burdens, increase existing dollar amounts, or raise statutory limits on existing authorized monetary burdens, such as fines and fees imposed through the juvenile and criminal legal systems.

These are extraordinary times, and they call for extraordinary measures. We ask that you exercise your authority as governor and the leader of our state to ensure economic justice for all during this unprecedented public health and economic emergency.

Sincerely,

Janos Marton,
Dream Corps JUSTICE National Director