



Transit Table Response to Mayor Lightfoot's 2021 Fine & Fee Reforms

On September 20, Mayor Lori Lightfoot released the next steps in the City's fine and fee reforms as part of the budget. For the last three years, the City Clerk, the Mayor's office, department heads, and the Transit Table Coalition partners have met as part of the Fines and Fees Access Collaborative. This year's reforms to fines and fees come from that work. Our Transit Table members have had the opportunity to read the draft ordinance and review these recommendations.

The reforms are part of a two-year pilot that is currently planned to end in December of 2023. Through this pilot, many lower-income Chicagoans will have a chance to shed the years-old uncollectible debt and staggering fees that have led to financial distress for their families. Eligible and enrolled participants will also see base fines for most parking tickets reduced, and until 2023 will no longer face the absurd doubling of fines that has long been the city's policy. We are thankful that the pilot program offers some relief to economically marginalized Chicagoans and creates a path to debt relief from fines and fees.

The set of reforms presented by Mayor Lightfoot as part of the budget is one more long-overdue step toward relief from the fines and fees that create and exacerbate economic hardship for too many Chicagoans. Unfortunately, it does not make permanent, transformational changes. It does not change the fact that almost 10% of Chicago's general fund comes from fines and fees (compared to an average of just 2% in cities nationally), nor does it change the fact that in Chicago, you are [40% more likely to receive a ticket if you live in a Black or Brown neighborhood](#). Instead, forgiveness comes only after repayment of fines from the last three years, which could leave out Chicagoans with no income or limited income from accessing this relief. Since the City is receiving \$1.2 billion from the federal government to provide direct relief to Chicagoans, this year would have been an ideal opportunity for more sweeping debt relief and lasting reforms to fines and fees enforcement.

The Transit Table grounds our work and proposals based on our beliefs that public services should be funded from progressive sources of public revenue, and that people experiencing financial hardship should not face disproportionate punishment because

they can't afford steep fines and fees. Using these values, the Transit Table seeks broader reforms that will move the city further on our path to relief for economically marginalized Chicagoans. Next steps we see are:

- **Stop doubling tickets as a late penalty for all tickets.** Late fees should be capped at 10% and for people experiencing hardship waived completely.
- **End booting and towing of personal vehicles due to unpaid tickets.** Without a vehicle and a way to work, individuals cannot pay the debt accumulated.
- **Remove parking and traffic enforcement authority from the Chicago Police Department.** We estimate that staff hours of 48 full-time officers were used to write parking tickets alone in 2017 (the most recent year for which data is available). Additionally, CPD is the main driver of racial disparities in ticketing; the top 10 wards where Chicago Police officers issue parking tickets are all majority-Black wards.
- **Build off the current reform proposal to provide significant and permanent fines and fees relief to economically marginalized Chicagoans.**
 - **Create permanent more affordable, income-based payment plans,**
 - **Reduce base fines and waive late fees/surcharges accumulated due to inability to pay,**
 - **Automatically discharge all outstanding debts after 5 years, and**
 - **Allow unlimited “fix-it” tickets, which waive fines upon coming into compliance with administrative violations.**

Chicago has an opportunity to be a leader in reforming fines and fees. These measures, released by the Mayor, recognize the regressive effect that our fines and fees system have on our city residents, and take incremental but meaningful steps towards reform. A temporary pilot program that reforms fines and fees is just that: a temporary solution. Once the program sunsets, Chicago could easily return to previous levels of reliance on this regressive revenue source. We need to continue to take even bolder steps to support economically marginalized Chicagoans.

Author: The Transit Table Coalition, a team of service providers, advocates, and community leaders working to end transportation barriers that keep people out of work and in poverty by working on driver license suspension reform at the state level and Fine and Fee reform in Chicago.