



**PRESS RELEASE**

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**TENNESSEE STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE RELEASES REPORT ON  
LEGAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS IN TENNESSEE**

The Tennessee State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (SAC) has released its report on the policies and practices governing legal financial obligations in Tennessee's criminal justice system. Legal financial obligations ("LFOs), or penal debt, refers to the growing number of fees, taxes, surcharges and other expenses and costs imposed upon individuals charged or convicted in the criminal courts.

In its report, the Tennessee SAC cautions that the current use of LFO as a means of directly funding the State's criminal justice system might well have unintended negative consequences that are contrary to the important state policies of promoting the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals and ensuring a just, fair and equitable criminal justice system in Tennessee. Among its specific findings, the Tennessee SAC concluded that the number and type of fines and fees in criminal proceedings, for juveniles as well as adults, have grown substantially in the past decades and vary significantly by county, that accrued penal debt may exacerbate an individual's complex challenges in finding stable work, housing and transportation after a period of incarceration, and that the harsh consequences of penal debt appear to fall disproportionately upon women, the poor, and communities of color.

Diane Di Ianni, chair of the Tennessee SAC, states: "Governor Bill Lee and many legislators already have started the ball rolling on much-needed criminal justice reform. We submit this report to the Commission and encourage it to move near the top of the state's reform agenda. With impactful changes to the LFO funding system, Tennessee would move closer to achieving its goals of promoting the successful reentry of justice-involved individuals into our communities and ensuring fair and equitable justice for all. We hope that our report and its several recommendations contribute to that end."

The report is posted on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights website at <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2020/01-15-TN-LFO-Report.pdf>. A print version of the full report is also available from the Regional Program Unit of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and can be obtained by contacting Carolyn Allen, Regional Programs Unit, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Chicago, IL, at [callen@usccr.gov](mailto:callen@usccr.gov).

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing an annual federal civil rights enforcement report.

The Commission, by Congressional mandate, establishes Advisory Committees in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Committee members conduct reviews and produce reports and recommendations concerning local civil rights issues, including justice, voting, discrimination, housing, education, and other important themes. For information about the Commission and our Advisory Committees, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).