



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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CITY COUNCIL APPROVES COMPREHENSIVE FINES AND FEES REFORMS

Reforms mark the first step in addressing a series of policies which have historically and disproportionately impacted people who can least afford it

CHICAGO - The City Council today approved Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot's fines and fees reform package as the first step to ending harmful enforcement practices that have historically impacted financially challenged communities at disproportionate levels. Today's new policies provide relief from City ticket debt by removing barriers to compliance and creating additional pathways to economic stability.

"This package represents a key first step in my administration's commitment to overhauling Chicago's regressive fines and fees structure that has disproportionately impacted low-income residents - the people who can least afford it - for far too long," said Mayor Lightfoot. "By reducing the debt burden with equitable policies that promote pathways to compliance and economic stability, we are removing barriers to employment that so many people have endured due to crushing debt."

This first set of comprehensive fines and fees reforms calls for ending driver's license suspensions for non-payment of non-driving and vehicle compliance violations, creating more accessible payment plans for all motorists, introducing boot reform policies for those experiencing financial hardship and reforming the City Sticker fines that have become one of the most regressive penalties residents face, throwing some into a cycle of debt.

The proposed policies include input from dozens of advocacy groups and city departments all members of the Fines, Fees & Access Collaborative, formed in December 2018 and led by City Clerk Anna M. Valencia

"As elected officials we have a responsibility to implement policies that break down barriers for our residents," said City Clerk Valencia. "When I started the Fines, Fees & Access Collaborative I knew that working directly with advocates and bringing together different lived experiences, we could create options that work for all of our residents. That's why I'm thrilled to see this historic legislation become law and thank Mayor Lightfoot for taking this on. This is a monumental accomplishment and the first step in our goal of building a city that gives all residents the opportunity to thrive."



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The City will roll out the reform package in two phases with some aspects coming online immediately, while others becoming effective on November 15, after technology and programming systems have been fully implemented.

Immediately upon passage, the following reforms will become effective:

- Reducing City Sticker penalties: Ending doubling of City Sticker tickets from \$200 to \$400, capping the late payment fine at \$50; reinstating the 15-day grace period for City Sticker tickets after expiration, and there will no longer be same-day or consecutive day ticketing for compliance violations.
- Eliminating driver's license suspensions for non-driving violations: Changes to the municipal code that will end the practice of referring individuals for driver's license suspension to the State of Illinois for non-payment of standing, parking and compliance violations.

On November 15, residents can take advantage of the following reforms:

- Making payment plans more accessible: By creating a 6-month payment plan for all, lowering down payments and allowing more time to pay for person experiencing hardship, the City will be ensuring additional pathways to compliance for paying ticket debt. Collectively, these reforms will give Chicago some of the most accessible ticket payment plans of any city in the nation.
- Denver boot reforms: All individuals will be able to request a 24-hour extension to pay their fines in full or get on a payment plan after being booted. The new payment plans will also make it easier for low-income individuals to redeem their car after it has been booted.

The anticipated benefits of the fines and fees reforms are two-fold: first, they will address the issue of inequitable impacts of vehicle ticket debt; and second they give residents more affordable payment plan options so that they can pay off their debt while retaining their vehicle. It is expected that the addition of the payment plans and 24-hour extension for booted cars will also help reduce overall impoundments.

For the tens of thousands of city residents who accumulate delinquent debt each year, an inability to pay fines and fees puts them at greater risk of losing their car and falling into bankruptcy or unemployment. Chicago's system of fines and fees has resulted in Cook County being given the unfortunate title of nationwide leader in Chapter 13 bankruptcies, with roughly two-thirds of Cook County bankruptcies including vehicle debt to the City of Chicago.

In the coming weeks, the City, in partnership with the City Clerk's Office, will be announcing a debt forgiveness program focused on City Sticker compliance and ticket debt. The first step will be getting residents who are not currently in compliance, to purchase a City Sticker. The second step will offer debt forgiveness allowing people that



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come into compliance with the City Sticker requirements some relief with previously issued tickets and offer a fresh start to return to good standing with the City.

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