



PUBLIC JUSTICE
IMPACT. CHANGE.

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JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

Please post and inform potential applicants.

May 2023

SPONSORSHIP FOR DEBTORS' PRISON LEGAL FELLOWSHIP STARTING FALL 2024 WASHINGTON, D.C., OAKLAND, CA, or REMOTE

[Public Justice](#) is a public interest legal advocacy organization that takes on some of the biggest systemic threats to justice of our time – abusive corporate power and predatory practices, the assault on civil rights and liberties, and the destruction of the earth's sustainability. We combine high-impact litigation with strategic communications and strong partnerships with other advocates to fight these abusive and discriminatory systems and win social and economic justice. Our [Debtors' Prison Project](#) invites rising third-year law students and law graduates to apply for an opportunity to work with us as a Legal Fellow. We seek to host a candidate to apply for one- or two-year public interest fellowships from funders such as Skadden, Equal Justice Works, and/or Justice Catalyst to begin in the fall of 2024.

Debtors' Prison Project (DPP) Overview

Public Justice's Debtors' Prison Project ("DPP") is a strategic litigation project that combats the criminalization of poverty. Our work aims to counter the incentives for governments and private companies to shift the costs of the criminal legal system onto those least able to pay: indigent criminal defendants, their families, and their communities. We fight for the rights of individuals facing jail because they can't pay fines and fees, and we fight against the abusive imposition, enforcement, and collection of fines and fees.

No one should lose their freedom because they lack the means to pay a fine. But indigent criminal defendants still face the threat of jail and other substantial liberty deprivations when they can't pay. Local governments often use traffic tickets and fines to fund their operations. Police target the neighborhoods with the least power and ticket Black and Latine communities at higher rates than whites. Many people are fined for infractions linked directly to poverty, such as driving with expired tags or sleeping outdoors. These disparities are exacerbated by predatory for-profit corporations hired to supervise people on probation, collect past-due criminal debt, and electronically monitor people on supervised release. The companies tack on their own fees, trapping people in a spiral of debt and forcing them to choose between paying for life's necessities and paying the fines. The result? A two-tiered justice system that punishes people simply because they are poor. We launched DPP in 2018 to take on this system. Our goals are to win compensation for victims, deter future abuses, and establish legal precedents to guard against the exploitation and incarceration of indigent defendants.

The Fellowship

The Fellow would work closely with DPP attorneys to create an innovative litigation and advocacy project focused on a specific area of our work, potentially in a single jurisdiction. Possible focus areas include:

- **Consumer protection cases on behalf of low-income criminal defendants against private actors in the criminal justice system.** This project could build on our first-of-its-kind [consumer lawsuit](#) against Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, LLP for threatening low-income Iowans with jail and loss of their driver's licenses for failing to reimburse the state of Iowa for the cost of their indigent defense fees. A Fellow could develop new ways to use consumer protection statutes to hold private actors—debt collectors, electronic monitoring companies, private probation providers, etc.—accountable for abusing and misleading low-income people who owe criminal debt.
- **Challenging the imposition of public defender fees.** The Constitution entitles indigent defendants to counsel at government expense. Yet many defendants are ultimately charged for the costs of their “free” legal representation. A Fellow could investigate and bring legal challenges to these fees on behalf of adults or youth in delinquency proceedings.
- **Challenging constitutional violations by supervised probation and electronic monitoring providers.** When cities rely on fines and fees to fund their operations, they have an incentive to use probation and monitoring to collect debt and maximize revenue rather than for any legitimate penal objective. To make matters worse, government functions are outsourced to for-profit actors whose “user fees” are then paid by the “offenders.” A Fellow could investigate and develop constitutional claims challenging these practices.
- **A project of your design.** We want to hear your ideas! For example:
 - DPP's 2020 Skadden Fellow, John He, developed new challenges to the imposition of unpayable fines and fees using the Eighth Amendment's Excessive Fines Clause.
 - DPP's 2022 Skadden Fellow, Jacquelyn Oesterblad, provides direct representation and impact litigation on behalf of unhoused people in Arizona challenging the collection of fines, fees, surcharges, and court debts arising from homelessness-related offenses.

Qualifications

- J.D. degree (by Fall 2024).
- Commitment to criminal justice reform and racial justice.
- Advanced analytical, legal research, legal writing, and speaking skills.
- Litigation experience (e.g., from internships, clinics, or clerkships).
- Ability to juggle multiple tasks at a time and work in a fast-paced environment.
- Self-motivation and proven ability to work independently and as part of a team.
- Sensitivity to the needs and concerns of, and ability to work well with, individuals and groups from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and orientations.
- Advanced attention to detail and commitment to follow-through.
- Strong organizational skills.
- Healthy sense of outrage and desire to change the world for the better.

We offer a mission-focused work environment and a teamwork approach. We offer healthy work-life balance policies, including operating on a **four-day work week year-round**. We also offer a generous

benefits package, including three weeks of paid vacation, two weeks of sick leave, and two personal days each year, all federal holidays, employer-paid health, dental and vision insurance premiums, and a 401(k) plan. The annual salary is \$70,000. Employment is contingent upon the receipt of funding from Skadden, Equal Justice Works, Justice Catalyst or a similar funder in an amount no less than \$50,000 per year.

Applications

Your application should consist of two electronic files: (1) your cover letter, resume, law school transcript, and references in a single .pdf file; and (2) a writing sample in another .pdf file, comprised of a legal brief or persuasive memo for which you were the primary author (please note the contributions of others). In your cover letter, please describe your interest in DPP and your proposed project. Please also specify whether you are applying to work in the Washington, D.C. office, Oakland, CA office (other DPP attorneys are based in Oakland), or remotely. Please send your application to lawfellow@publicjustice.net. Reference "2024 Debtors' Prison Project Fellowship Sponsorship" in the subject line. The application deadline is **June 19** at which point applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until the position is filled. For more information on Public Justice, please visit our website at www.publicjustice.net.

Public Justice EEO Statement

Public Justice is an equal opportunity employer and values a diverse workplace. We strongly encourage applications from people with disabilities; people of color, including bilingual and bicultural individuals; 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals; people of all genders; veterans; previously incarcerated individuals; and people of all ages. Public Justice is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities. If you require reasonable accommodation during any part of the hiring process, please email mmediavilla@publicjustice.net.