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JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

May 2026

SPONSORSHIP FOR DEBTORS' PRISON PROJECT LEGAL FELLOWSHIP STARTING FALL 2027

WASHINGTON, D.C. or REMOTE

Public Justice is a public interest legal advocacy organization that takes on 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 connect high-impact litigation with strategic communications and the strength of our partnerships 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 2027. In consultation with Public Justice, candidates can decide which funders they apply to.

Debtors' Prison Project (DPP) Overview

The Debtors' Prison Project is dedicated to fighting the criminalization of poverty nationwide in every aspect of the legal system: from arrest to the imposition and collection of criminal, civil, and immigration fines and fees. Working with allies and impacted communities, we use strategic litigation to ensure no one is punished simply because they are poor and to stop governments and for-profit corporations from treating people impacted by the criminal, civil, and immigration systems as a revenue source to exploit.

Our approach recognizes that turning the legal system into a wealth extraction system harms poor people and traps the most vulnerable members of our communities in a cycle of poverty and oppression. We fight to identify, attack, and ultimately dismantle the policies, laws, and narratives

that contribute to this unequal treatment of rich and poor and that allow entities to profit from a captive market of system-impacted people.

Our work goes beyond the courthouse. As advocates fighting against the criminalization of poverty and the abuses of the legal system, we fight to empower people—including families, Black and Brown communities, incarcerated people, and immigrant communities—to organize for change. Working with advocates and partner organizations, we engage in policy advocacy and public education campaigns to improve laws and practices.

The Fellowship

Consistent with their funded project, the fellow would work on litigation and advocacy with DPP attorneys and report to the Director of DPP. The fellowship would be an exempt position. Employment is contingent upon the receipt of funding from an external funder in an amount no less than \$50,000 per year.

We will work closely with the selected candidate to craft an appropriate project proposal focused on a specific area of our work, ideally developing affirmative litigation in a single jurisdiction to which the candidate has personal ties. Here are a few examples of potential project focus areas—but we want to hear your ideas!

- Develop new, cutting-edge legal claims (e.g. under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act) on behalf of people who are charged “pay-to-stay” fees for their time in jail or prison against for-profit debt collectors pursuing them for the debt;
- Develop litigation on behalf of homeless people whose vehicles are towed and impounded by police, either as a direct result of their homelessness (because of bans on residing in a vehicle on public land and streets) or for some other infraction, making it impossible for them to retrieve the car without paying exorbitant fees;
- Develop litigation challenging wealth-based detention on behalf of people who are being detained pretrial or denied parole solely because they do not have housing;
- Develop litigation on behalf of immigrants who are facing deportation solely because they cannot afford the increased fees to pursue appeals and certain forms of immigration relief;
- Develop litigation on behalf of immigrants whose property is confiscated and then “lost” when they are arrested;

Projects for which previous DPP fellows have been awarded funding include:

- Developing new challenges to the imposition of unpayable fines and fees using the Eighth Amendment’s Excessive Fines Clause;
- Developing impact litigation on behalf of unhoused people in Arizona challenging the criminalization of homelessness, including the imposition of court debts arising from homelessness-related offenses; and

- Investigating potential impact litigation on behalf of people in Tennessee who were denied court-appointed counsel or billed for public defender fees.

Qualifications

- J.D. degree (by Fall 2027);
- Admission to a state bar or pending admission (by Fall 2027);
- Litigation experience (e.g., from internships, clinics, or clerkships);
- Strong commitment to racial justice and to ending mass incarceration and wealth-based punishment;
- Excellent analytical, legal research, and legal writing skills;
- Excellent communication and public speaking skills;
- Self-motivation and proven ability to work independently and as part of a team;
- Ability to juggle multiple tasks at a time and work in a fast-paced environment;
- Creativity, initiative, strong work ethic, and sound judgment;
- Excellent attention to detail and commitment to follow-through;
- Willingness to travel;
- Healthy distrust of governmental authority;
- Care and respect for people who are system-involved;
- Comfort meeting with potential clients and witnesses in jail and prison settings; and
- Ability and willingness to contribute to the creation of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work community that thrives on collaboration.

Compensation & Benefits

The Fellowship would be an exempt position that reports to the Director of Debtor's Prison Project and works closely with the attorneys of the legal projects. Our attorneys are paid on a salary scale based on years out of law school. The annual salary for an attorney who is less than a year out of law school is \$84,500.

Public Justice operates as a remote organization, embracing flexibility and inclusivity that remote work offers. However, recognizing the value of in-person collaboration and the need for physical office space, Public Justice has an office in Washington, DC. Because Public Justice handles litigation, education, and advocacy nationally, the position will entail some travel.

We offer a mission-focused work environment, a teamwork and community-oriented work culture, and a competitive compensation package. We recognize and support healthy work-life balance policies, including operating on a four-day work week year-round. We also offer a generous benefits package, including flexible time off, two weeks of sick leave, all federal and some local holidays, end of the year office closure, employer-paid health, dental, and vision insurance premiums for employees and eligible dependents, and a 401(k) plan.

How to Apply

Your application should consist of **two** electronic files:

- (1) A single PDF file containing the following:

- Cover letter that conveys why you are drawn to DPP’s work, how your experience fits with our mission, and your vision for your project. Please specify in your cover letter whether you are applying to work in the Washington, D.C. office or remotely.
- Resume.
- Law school transcript (official or unofficial).
- Contact information for three references.

(2) A separate PDF file with one or more writing samples. At least one sample should be a legal brief or memorandum unedited or only lightly edited by others; please include a cover sheet explaining the extent of any such editing.

Please send your application to lawfellow@publicjustice.net. Reference “**2027 DPP Fellowship**” in the subject line. Starting on **Thursday, June 13, 2025**, applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until the position is filled.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Access

We recognize that creating a truly equitable, inclusive, and diverse organization is an ongoing journey, and we’re proud and excited to share our journey with you. Please read our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy, available [here](#).

Public Justice is an equal-opportunity employer and values a diverse workplace. We are committed to providing an environment of mutual respect where equitable employment opportunities are available to all applicants. We encourage applications from all qualified individuals without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, age, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, disability, veteran status, record of arrest or conviction, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law. People of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and gender diverse people, women, people with abilities in multiple languages, immigrants, people living with disabilities, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals are strongly encouraged to apply.

Public Justice is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities. If you require reasonable accommodations during any part of the hiring process, please email HR@publicjustice.net.

Studies have shown that members of marginalized groups tend to underestimate their qualifications and are less likely to apply for jobs unless they believe they meet every single one of the qualifications in a job description, despite the reality that applicants rarely ever meet 100% of the qualifications. We are committed to building a diverse and inclusive organization and are most interested in finding the best candidate for the role. That candidate may come from a background less traditional to our field of work, and that’s okay! We strongly encourage you to apply, even if you don’t believe you meet every one of the qualifications described.