



The Philadelphia Courts

First Judicial District of Pennsylvania

NEWS

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FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT ANNOUNCES ‘STAND UP, PAY UP’ CAMPAIGN TO COLLECT MILLIONS FROM 200,000 CITIZENS

PHILADELPHIA, PA -- Officials of the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania (FJD), which comprises the entire Philadelphia Courts system, staged a City Hall press conference today to announce the launch of a comprehensive new public outreach campaign to collect millions of dollars in bail money owed by as many as 200,000 people. The campaign, dubbed “Stand Up, Pay Up,” includes a dedicated payment line, 215-683-1482, several mailings; [the public listing of the names of all who owe bail and the amount they owe on the FJD](#) and City of Philadelphia web sites with a secure web application that allows them to pay on-line; public service announcements; and outreach partnerships with religious leaders and social service agencies in Philadelphia. The FJD estimates that there is as much as \$1 billion in bail monies that have gone uncollected, dating back 40 years. The average amount of uncollected bail owed is approximately \$4,500. The monies collected through this effort will be transferred to the City of Philadelphia’s general operating fund.

“This campaign is both timely and extremely vital,” said the Honorable Pamela P. Dembe, President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia. “Philadelphia continues to face serious fiscal challenges and, although the FJD was not responsible for this accumulation of debt, it is nonetheless incumbent upon us and all branches of government to do everything in our collective power to identify and pursue all outstanding debts and revenue sources. This enormous backlog of uncollected bail monies did not develop overnight, nor will it be resolved quickly. The ‘Stand Up, Pay Up’ campaign does, however, represent a serious, long-term commitment by the First Judicial District to thoroughly seek out and collect monies owed by as many as 200,000 people. This task will not be easy, given the transient nature of people, but we will be exhaustive in our attempts to collect as much bail money as possible and will employ every legal means at our disposal. Even a very modest return on our collection efforts of 1 - 2% of one billion dollars would be of enormous financial help to the city.”

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Although the FJD has the legal right to execute on judgments, hold contempt hearings, and even seize certain equities of those who owe bail – including property – President Judge Dembe hastened to clarify that the “Stand Up, Pay Up” campaign is not intended to be punitive, but rather will be executed fairly and with due consideration to individual circumstances.

“We understand that, for many of the individuals in question, they may be in the process of rebuilding their lives as productive, law-abiding citizens and simply cannot afford to make immediate and complete amends on the money they owe,” added President Judge Dembe. “We encourage these folks to come forward and work with us to resolve their debt. We can arrange payment plans so as not to overly-burden them financially and, in some hardship cases, we may even be willing to negotiate the total amount owed to the Courts. We want to treat all those who owe bail money with a sense of dignity. We are not out to hurt or embarrass anyone during this process, but fairness is also a two-way street. Fair is making sure the city has enough money to keep libraries and pools open. Fair is making sure the city has enough money to keep our police and fire fighters on the job. It is our sincere hope that people will willingly stand up and pay up, so they can unburden themselves of their debt to society and also help the city emerge out of its fiscal crisis.”

At today’s press conference, President Judge Dembe also announced the FJD’s alliance with the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity and the Philadelphia Peaceful Surrender program on the implementation of the “Step Up, Pay Up” campaign. Religious leaders of the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, under the direction of its president, Bishop Audrey F. Bronson, have long played a pivotal role in counseling and rehabilitating offenders, as has the Philadelphia Peaceful Surrender program, an ongoing initiative that allows fugitives with outstanding warrants in Philadelphia to turn themselves in at various churches and faith institutions strategically located throughout the city. Those who willingly surrender are escorted by Philadelphia Peaceful Surrender volunteers to the Criminal Justice Center. The initiative, under the direction of Reverend Marguerite Handy, allows these citizens to be treated with dignity and respect throughout the entire surrender process.

The “Stand Up, Pay Up” campaign, in which the FJD is able to identify those who owe bail, dun them, and collect on monies owed, appears to be unprecedented. If it succeeds, the program may become a national “Best Practices” model that could be replicated by other cities facing similar challenges in collecting unpaid bail money. The FJD intends to issue quarterly updates as to the progress of the “Stand Up, Pay Up” campaign.

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