

News Release

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Durham Joins NLC Initiative to Mitigate Negative Impacts of Municipal Fines and Fees on Residents

DURHAM, N.C. - The National League of Cities (NLC) has selected the City of Durham to participate in its [Cities Addressing Fines and Fees Equitably \(CAFFE\)](#), a six-city technical assistance initiative designed to help cities assess and reform their use of local fines and fees and develop equitable collections strategies.

According to the NLC, cities frequently miss key opportunities in their current approaches to fines and fees since residents who are unable to pay fines and fees often struggle with other debt and financial burdens and may not be aware of financial empowerment services available to them in their communities.

According to Mayor Steve Schewel, whether triggered by courts, unpaid bills for city-provided services, or other administrative actions, municipal fines and fees can impose a crushing burden on low-income residents. "If we are to be an equitable city for all, we must seek opportunities to help our low-income residents prosper in our city, and be equitable in all of our practices, which includes how our City levies fines and fees," Schewel said.

NLC's CAFFE initiative will assist Durham in implementing innovative financial empowerment approaches to help residents who are in debt to the City as a result of municipal fines and fees. NLC will also draw upon lessons from its [LIFT-UP program](#), which successfully assisted cities in reducing residents' water utility debt.

According to Schewel, the City Administration has not yet settled on which municipal collections will be focused on as part of this initiative. "Our staff will now review our data to determine which fines and fees are the largest sources of revenue, and start our equity analysis from there," Schewel said.

In addition to Durham, the five other cities joining the project include Aurora, Colo.; Baton Rouge, La.; Lansing, Mich.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Saint Paul, Minn. NLC's CAFFE project focuses on this six-city cohort, which will receive grants and technical assistance to assess their fines and fees structures within at least one of their municipal collections entities; learn new ways to reduce inequities in how fines and fees are imposed; and make program or policy changes that lead to a new collections model for the City, connecting residents in debt with services that improve their financial health.

Durham will also have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the [City of San Francisco's Financial Justice Project](#), and their work to assess and structurally reform how fines and fees impact low-income residents. The CAFFE initiative is made possible with support from JPMorgan Chase and Co.

About National League of Cities

The [National League of Cities](#) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities.

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