

I have read the complaint filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center and have reviewed the allegations contained in the complaint concerning the procedures employed in City Court for misdemeanor offenses.

The public should be assured that imposing jail time on misdemeanor violations is a matter that the Court does not take lightly. Incarceration is typically a matter of last resort.

The process begins with an arrest by police, after which the defendant is given an arraignment date. If the defendant pleads guilty or is found guilty after trial, the Court then would impose a sentence that almost always directs the payment of a fine or community service, but in default of either could result in jail time. In cases where a fine is imposed, the defendant is usually given at least 30 days to pay the fine if he or she is unable to pay at the time of sentencing. If the fine is still not paid within this additional period, the Court could impose the jail time but may consider a request for a further extension as an alternative to imposing jail time.

In those cases where a further extension is requested, the Court has recently been requiring the defendant to pay a \$50 extension fee to help defray the costs occasioned by the additional proceedings. These fees have not and cannot be used as compensation to the City Court Judge.

It is the Court's understanding that the collection of these or similar costs is utilized by other courts in Louisiana; nevertheless, the Court at this time has suspended this practice pending further review.

In the meantime we have agreed to postpone the hearing dates which are now set for July 13 and July 20 in federal court. The reasons we have agreed to do this are (1) to allow the issues raised in this complaint, which may affect other courts throughout this state, to be reviewed and considered by all interested parties and (2) to allow the attorneys to have further discussions to determine whether there may be ways to resolve these issues.

The Court appreciates the concerns of the Southern Poverty Law Center and looks forward to discussions with the plaintiffs' attorneys. In the meantime, members of the public are invited to attend our misdemeanor court proceedings every Monday from 9:30 am until late afternoon and witness for themselves that each case is judged on an individual basis.