

Statement from NAACP & ACLU-MN to Hennepin County

NAACP Minneapolis and ACLU-MN are united in declaring Warrant Forgiveness Day an unmitigated success. Nearly 150 people with outstanding misdemeanor warrants were able to meet with a lawyer and a judge and have their warrants either dismissed or resolved through community service. We are thrilled that the partnership with Hennepin County has allowed our communities to address these warrants in an accessible, restorative, and humane manner:

- Accessible: Hosting Warrant Forgiveness Day at Sabathani community center on a Saturday removed barriers that kept participants from addressing their warrants previously, such as intimidation or traumatic memories associated with the courthouse, and business hours that preclude many balancing multiple employment and family responsibilities.
- Restorative: Rather than being re-enmeshed in a cycle of shame and punishment, participants were able to take responsibility for the actions that led to their warrants and repair harm by contributing positively to the community through projects with Open Arms, Volunteers of America, and local churches.
- Humane: Providing meals and childcare, having friendly volunteers from diverse communities, and allowing participants and judges to sit down face-to-face created a transformative environment where participants could proceed with dignity and be seen as a person, rather than being defined only by their deficits in the eye of the law. The process allowed participants to feel less stressed and more confident, their humanity stayed intact, and they were able to walk out free. Furthermore the process reestablished their faith that the county governmental process can be humane.

In addition to these obvious prosocial and community benefits, Warrant Forgiveness Day provides a net financial gain for Hennepin County. With the county spending \$8K, and NAACP/ACLU-MN spending \$7K of our United Way grant funding, the total cost of serving 150 participants was \$15K. When we consider the cost benefits, this process outweighs jailing people. The cost of one night stay in jail is approximately \$132 in Hennepin County. We also know people with outstanding warrants commonly spend up to 3 to 5 days in jail. The savings for the taxpayers is conspicuous and unmistakable.

We at the NAACP and ACLU-MN are eager to continue to partner with Hennepin County for the mutual benefit of the courts and community. We strongly propose holding another Misdemeanor Warrant Forgiveness Day in late August for the following reasons:

- Increase participation based on word-of-mouth from satisfied May 20 participants.
- Capitalize on the momentum created by the previous planning and organizing.
- Resolve warrants before the start of the school year to help more parents take an active role in their children's education.
- Benefit the taxpayers of MN.
- Reduce the staggering number of people who have warrants in a humane and restorative manner.
- Raise the profile of the county in the community.

While overall we were impressed with the efficiency and efficacy of operations May 20, we have several suggestions for future events:

- Organizers, court staff, and volunteers should plan to carpool, take public transportation, or park off-site to allow for maximum use of the parking lot by participants.
- More advertising on Facebook and KMOJ since these were the places participants reported hearing about the event.

- More community service projects hosted by community organizations that serve hennepin county area.
- Advertise early for volunteers on Facebook and KMOJ so we can recruit a more volunteers from the primary communities being served.

In concluding, we would like to emphasize the success and enormous transformative potential of events like these in the words of some of our participants:

“...I’m so happy to be warrant free! The process took less than an hour, but because they provided the option of completing community service obligations, I was able to knock that out of the way! Many thanks for holding this.” – Anonymous

“ This program ...helped me clear my warrant I had for seven years. Court was a hassle, but this program made it so easy!” – Kelly R.

“This program was specially helpful for low income folks, who are hand to mouth.” – Anonymous

“I just want to thank everyone involved in this event. This whole experience has changed my life! I went from almost having to complete 10 days in jail, to 6 days of STS, to 4 hours of community service for driving without insurance. Everyone treated me with respect and was very helpful. Programs like this help the community. I will be volunteering on the next event. ” – Sharita C.

“...the Warrant Forgiveness Day was a one stop shop! It was so convenient. The hours...was great. There was...public defenders, clerks... and yes, “judges”. I was even allowed to do community service on site, which completes my debt. How great is that! Thank you!” - Johnson V.

“This is probably the MOST beneficial thing that has happened to me this year. I don’t have to wonder anymore. Worry about if I’ll be separated from child is GONE!! I am not a career criminal. I’m a single mother who made a mistake. And now I am free to move forward fearlessly. Able to use my voice. Thank you!”
– Anonymous

“It saved me from paying a costly fee that would have hurt my pockets. I was able to talk to a (public) defender ASAP, then get a resolution to solve my case and have a possible new court date.” - Spencer N.

“...I’m going through a divorce,...and going through a really tough time. I’m also homeless. The best thing I have going for me is my job which I love. So when I heard about Warrant Forgiveness Day, I knew I had nothing to lose. ...had the opportunity to talk to professionals who were happy to help! This chance meant everything to me!” – Lia G.