

# DECRIMINALIZE POVERTY

Minnesota's legal system implicitly criminalizes poverty. People with the fewest resources are the most affected because they can't afford fines, fees or property lost to forfeiture. A penalty such as a driver's license suspension can routinely lead to devastating outcomes including job loss and even incarceration, solely based on the ability to pay.

## Reform Civil Asset Forfeiture

### What is Civil Asset Forfeiture?

Civil asset forfeiture allows law enforcement to seize property or cash if they suspect it's connected to a criminal offense. People must go through a civil court process to try to get their property back, regardless of whether they are convicted of a crime. If they don't challenge the seizure within a short timeframe, law enforcement can keep or sell it.

### What is the Problem?

The civil asset forfeiture system lacks protections for property rights and due process rights. It also disproportionately harms low-income people. Low-income individuals may lose their rent payment or the only car their family owns. Yet they also have the fewest resources to exercise their rights to get their property back.

### What is the Solution?

**HF 75/SF 444** would establish a higher threshold for cash seizures and protect more low-income Minnesotans from the disproportionate impact of the forfeiture system. Increasing protections for innocent owners of seized property better protects property and due process rights. Restricting use of federal work-arounds ensures that forfeitures in Minnesota will comply with state law. Increased reporting requirements will increase transparency and accountability about how law enforcement uses forfeiture proceeds.

## Reform Fines and Fees

### What are Fines and Fees?

Minnesota law allows excessive traffic fines and fees and allows the suspension of someone's driver's license if they fail to pay a fine for a traffic violation or don't appear in court for a ticket.

### What is the Problem?

Driving-related fines and fees can add up. If people can't afford to pay their fines quickly, they can lose their licenses, which can lead to job loss and even jail time.

### What is the Solution?

**HF 306/SF 902 and HF 336/SF 432** would end driver's license suspensions for unpaid traffic tickets, require courts to consider someone's ability to pay fines and fees, and increase the court's discretion to waive court surcharges. Reforming Minnesota's system of escalating fines and excessive fees would allow people to keep their licenses, keep their jobs, and stay out of jail for low-level violations. It would make the court system more equitable, regardless of people's ability to pay.