

Data-Driven Justice Workshop –
Office of the County Executive
Pierce County

Pierce County LFO Reconsideration Day: Preliminary Data Analysis

Karin D. Martin and Matt Fowle
Evans School of Public Policy & Governance
University of Washington

LFO Reconsideration Day

- In partnership with Civil Survival
 - Successful LFO day in Kitsap County, Apr. 2019
- Kelsey Page and Mary Kay High were our main contacts
- Researchers tasked with collecting data day of

- *Ultimate Goal: merge survey data with court data*
 - *Track outcomes for participants vs. non-participants*
- Today: Overview of preliminary findings

Extent of CJ Debt in Pierce County

- Between 2010 and 2017, Pierce County municipal, district, and superior courts assessed \$332 million in court fines, fees, and interest, to approximately 340,000 individuals in 647,000 cases (~1/3 repaid)
- Somewhat equally distributed across court levels
 - municipal courts (*city violations*): \$99.7 million
 - district court (*misdemeanors*): \$127 million
 - superior court (*felonies*): \$105 million
- Traffic offenses comprise more than 8 in 10 cases with assessed LFOs (*67% infraction and 17% criminal*)

Conclusions from our Previous Study

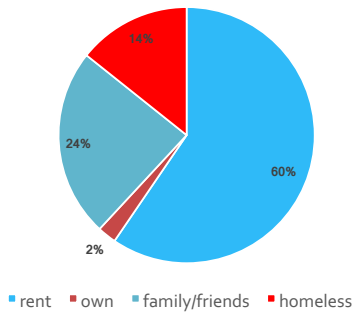
- Criminal justice debt is extensive in Pierce county with significant impacts on low-income individuals
- A variety of feasible policy options could help address various disparities
- The result would be improved equity and efficiency in the Pierce county criminal justice system

Participant Data: Overview

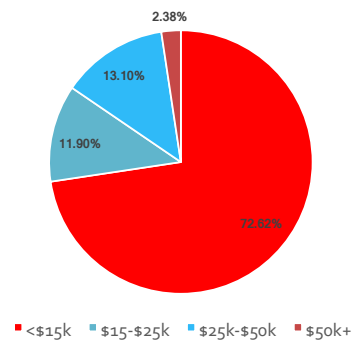
		LFO Day Sample	Pierce County Pop.
GENDER	Female	44.0%	50.2%
	Male	56.0%	49.8%
RACE	Asian	3.6%	6.7%
	Black	38.1%	7.5%
	Hispanic or Latinx	3.6%	10.9%
	Native American	6.0%	1.7%
	White	48.8%	75.2%
EDUCATION	Less than high school diploma	13.1%	8.8%
	High school degree or GED	51.2%	27.8%
	Occupational/vocational certificate	14.3%	n/a
	Associate's	16.7%	11.1%
	Bachelor's	3.6%	17.1%
	Advanced degree	1.2%	8.9%

Participant Data: Housing & Income

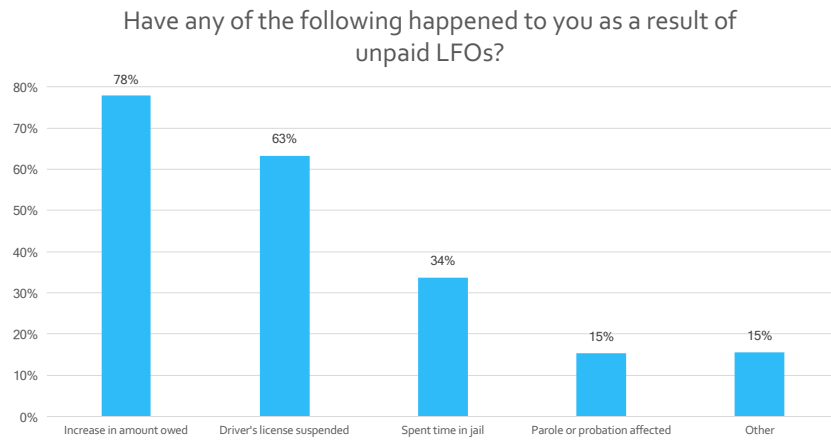
What is your current housing situation?



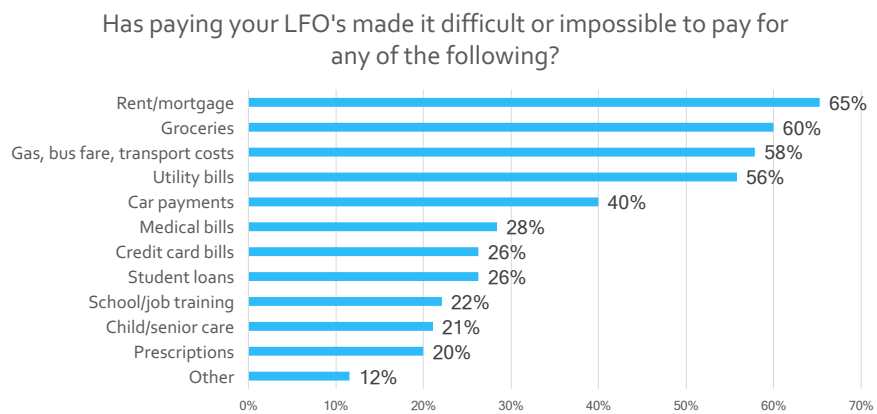
What is your annual income?



Participant Data: CJ Debt Consequences

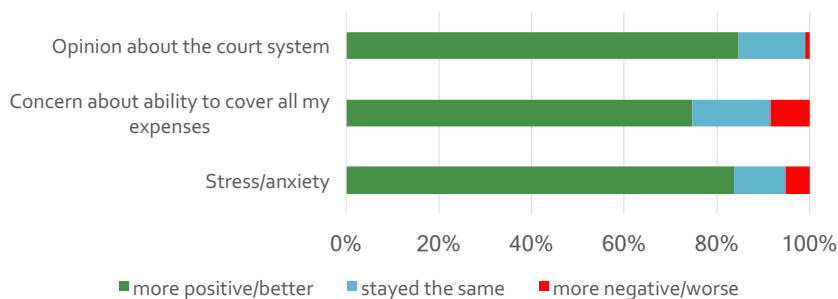


Participant Data: CJ Debt Consequences



Participant Data: Assessment of LFO Day

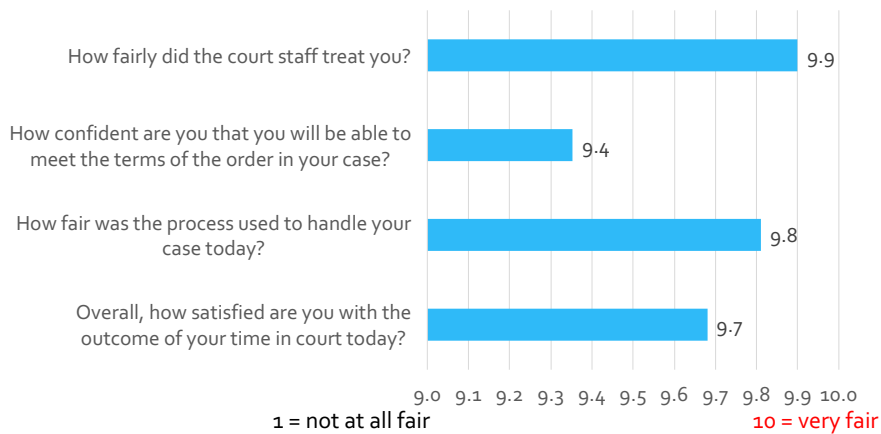
Compared to how you felt before today, how do you feel now?



"Would you recommend this event to other people?"

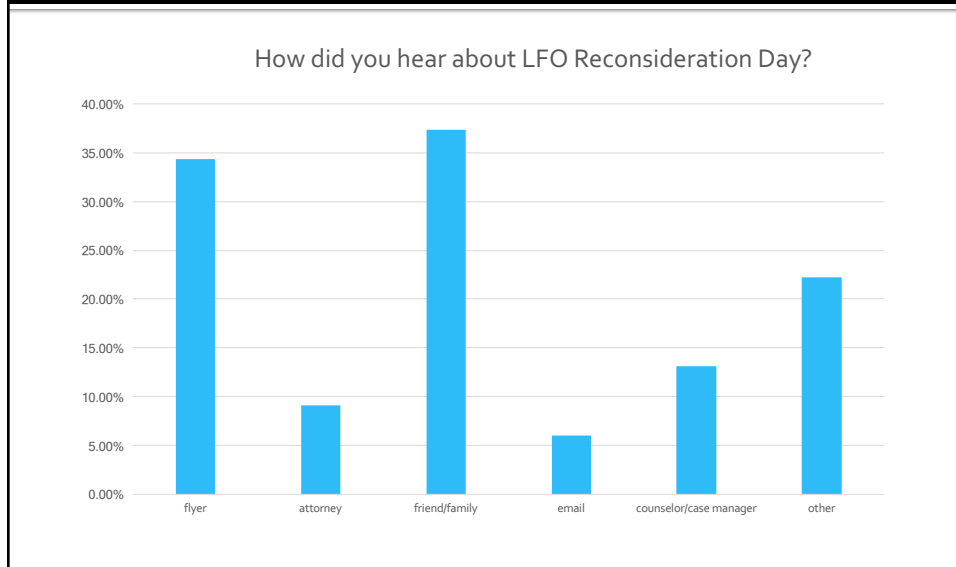
Yes = 99%

Participant Data: Assessment of LFO Day



Participants felt they were treated well by judges, prosecutors attorneys, and security staff (9.9/10 average).

Participant Data: Outreach



Participant Data: Direct Quotes

- "This has been a blessing in my journey to cleaning up my past and becoming a productive member of society"
- "Thank you so much. I have no help and 5 children my husband left us. I struggle daily. Thank you so much"
- "This has truly gave me a different outlook on me being more responsible and arranging to pay my fines on time and I thank the courts and your honor very much"
- "Legal issues/trouble I had gotten into when I was younger I believe will hold me down for most of my life. There comes a point when it seems pointless to continue trying to please the court. This is a big help for those of us trying. Thanks"

Participant Data: Direct Quotes

- "I am so overwhelmed and overjoyed at what I have witnessed today! True justice - moral righteousness. For the first time in over 20 years I believe in our justice system. Thank you!!!"
- "This is a true blessing. A judge has never said anything kind about me until today. Thank you"
- "I have the best feeling leaving today knowing I can finally take care of the rest of my past"

Participant Data: Recommendations

- Include restitution
- More clarity on previous and current amount owed
- Help with driver's licenses
- Crowd management:
 - Multiple days
 - More courts
 - More appointment times

Volunteer Data: Current Occupation

- 62% (18/29) Department of Assigned Counsel (mostly attorneys)
- 21% (6/29) Prosecutors
- 17% (5/29) Other Organizations
(Tacoma pro bono, housing justice project, solo practitioner)

Volunteer Data: LFO Day Role

- 38% (11/29) attorneys
- 31% (9/29) client assistance
- 14% (4/29) runner
- Other: coordination, planning, reviewing motions

Volunteer Data

What motivated your participation in this event?

- 41% (12/29) wanted to change the system
- 38% (11/29) wanted to help people (including their clients)

How do you rate the pre-event preparation?

- Average = 8

How do you rate the organization of the day?

- Average = 8

Volunteer Data: Direct Quotes

Did participating in LFO Reconsideration Day change your perceptions about defendants with legal financial obligations? If so, how?

- I knew that these people were under a mountain of debt. I don't think I realized the extent of that debt, or the incredibly small budgets on which they were living.
- The palpable relief for some of the people involved really underlined the idea that these fines and fees potentially have a substantial deleterious effect on mental health. I'd add it to a list of "invisible" stressors that people may be living with where they feel like they don't have a way to address the problem head-on, so they let it linger and try not to think about it.

Volunteer Data: Direct Quotes

What changes did you expect debt relief would have on participants? If your expectations changed after participating in LFO Reconsideration Day, please explain how.

- I assumed it would help them be able to move on in all aspects of life (housing, jobs, credit score, etc).
- I honestly expected more people to be ungrateful or maybe less effusive in their thanks. However, I worked all 8 hours that day and there was only one person who expressed anything negative about the experience.

Volunteer Data: Direct Quotes

Would you recommend the county, or other jurisdictions, conduct another LFO Reconsideration Day? If so, why? If not, why not? 100% responded "yes"

- Yes, I would recommend it! Again, defendants do not benefit from law changes because no single branch of the judicial system advises them of their right or assists in navigating the system to benefit from the change. LFO Reconsideration days do what has never been done.
- Absolutely. I think they should be done regularly! I'm sure there are thousands who would like to participate who weren't able to this time. I believe they should be given the same opportunity.
- I'm hoping that it becomes annual, bi-annual, or quarterly. It will be interesting to see the data on how it financially impacts the county and courthouse ... the potential community impact—those are dollars that the defendant can spend in the community rather than allocate to a never-ending payment plan for LFOs

Volunteer Data: Direct Quotes

What aspects of the event contributed most to its success?

- This event was incredibly well-organized. Having all the necessary information along with blank orders to fill out streamlined the process. Having prosecutors at the ready, working WITH us toward the same goal, was a pleasant change.
- The volunteers all had great attitudes, big smiles and made all of the clients feel at ease and created a positive energy for everyone to enjoy. I think that laid the foundation for the mood of the day.
- The positiveness & respect directed to the participants by the judges.

Volunteer Data: Direct Quotes

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at LFO Reconsideration Day?

- Reminded me why I do what I do... and sometimes we all need that
- I was so honored to be able to participate in this day. I think I helped my clients this day more than any other day I have been in practice.
- I watched so many people leave the court in tears and with a look of profound relief and hope on their faces. I don't get many days like that as a public defender. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I've had.

Volunteer Data: Recommendations

- People's frustration with restitution and infractions (LFO day could not address these)
- Step-by-step guide for each volunteer role
- Concern with people who have cases with victims being granted relief even though no attempts made to pay
- Stand-by list to compensate for no-shows

Next Steps

1. Merge survey data with court data
2. Needed Data:
 - a. Sign-up list (with name and DOB)
 - b. Participant list
 - c. Amount of debt forgiven (original minus new)

Our Questions

1. Additional LFO Reconsideration Days?
2. How will reduced debt be recorded in dataset?
3. What are the LFO abbreviations?
4. Are sign-ups still happening?
5. What other outcomes would be helpful to track?
 - Evictions? Arrests? Convictions? HMIS?

THANK YOU!

Karin D. Martin, PhD
Assistant Professor

Evans School of Public Policy & Governance
University of Washington

kdmartin@uw.edu