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Fines system is unfair for many disadvantaged community members

Research released today by Monash University's Criminal Justice Research Consortium, *An examination of the impact of unpaid infringement notices on disadvantaged groups and the criminal justice system*, reveals that the fines system adversely impacts on some of our most socially and financially disadvantaged community members.

"The report describes a complex and confusing fines system that operates in a discriminatory way against people experiencing poverty" says Tiffany Overall, Advocacy and Human Rights Officer at Youthlaw. "While the fines system works effectively for most members of the community who can afford to pay their fine and end the matter, people who don't have the means to pay have the stress of going to court and potentially ending up with a criminal record."

The report also notes the increasing use of infringement notices has placed a significant burden on community legal centres and Victoria Legal Aid as increasing numbers of disadvantaged people seek assistance to deal with infringement matters.

"Every business day young people, homeless people, people with disabilities and people experience severe financial hardship present to community legal centres with unpaid fines" said Ms Overall.

Youthlaw supports a range of the report's recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency and fairness of the fines, including

- disadvantaged community members being able to expiate their fines by non monetary means, and
- provisions should be implemented that allow those in financial hardship to apply for a standard concession rate

"We hope this research can effect changes to the law that will prevent those at social disadvantage coming into contact with the criminal justice system over unpaid fines. At the same time these changes could save government, court and community resources currently being spent on resolving this issue."

Youthlaw is a specialist law centre for young people under 25 years.

For further comment please contact Tiffany Overall direct on 03 9611 2422, mobile 0400903034 or tiffany@youthlaw.asn.au

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