



## Department of Justice

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ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Majority Leader Wayne McKinney  
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Representative Dan Jay  
Iowa House of Representatives  
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President Michael Gronstal  
Iowa Senate  
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Majority Leader Bill Hutchins  
Iowa Senate  
State Capitol  
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Senator Al Sturgeon  
Iowa Senate  
State Capitol  
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Dear Sirs:

I am writing to request that a legislative interim study committee be appointed to review collection of fines, court costs, surcharges and restitution. The issue of uncollected fines is crucial for several reasons.

First of all, offenders must be held accountable to victims. Victims of crime have the right to receive the money that the court orders the offender to pay as restitution. These payments help to make the victim whole again, and make the criminal justice system responsive to the needs of victims. Often, victims are in no better position to bear the cost of crime than offenders. Aggressive restitution collection brings greater justice to the criminal justice system.

Second, offenders can be held accountable for their crimes by bearing some portion of the costs of prosecution, to the extent that the offender is able to pay. Offenders should receive a clear message that they are responsible for the outlay of court costs and should be held accountable.

Third, too many offenders are allowed to ignore the court orders to pay fines, restitution or court costs. Our sentencing system cannot be effective if offenders realize that court orders can be disobeyed. A loss of respect for the court system is the most serious consequence of an ineffective collection system.

April 9, 1992

Finally, it is impossible to determine exactly how much is outstanding due to the lack of a tracking system. Millions of dollars are currently owed for restitution and fines. A tracking and collection enforcement system must be put into place in the near future. Systems that have been set up within the Department of Corrections and within the Crime Victim Compensation Program have demonstrated that success is possible. With careful implementation, a statewide collection system will pay for itself and help to recover a portion of the outstanding balance of fines, restitution and court costs that are currently owed.

The task of collections has been shared by several components of the criminal justice system, but no one component has been given the authority or the responsibility to collect fines, restitution or court costs. Greater coordination means greater effectiveness. A careful study by an interim committee can provide some needed guidance on how best to set up an effective statewide system of collection.

My office would be available to assist in this study. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Bonnie*

Bonnie J. Campbell  
Iowa Attorney General