

In *State v. Blake*, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that Washington's simple drug possession law was unconstitutional because it did not require the state to prove intent. Washington's failed drug policy directly harmed many individuals who were convicted under this unconstitutional statute and were required to pay fines and fees (legal financial obligations or "LFOs") in connection with their convictions. Now that *Blake* has invalidated this statute, Washington state and counties owe these individuals the LFOs they paid. These are their stories.

Lisa A. Nixon

My name is Lisa A. Nixon. Even though my possession charge from Asotin County was vacated a few years ago and I recently had my fines refunded, the County still owes me probation costs close to \$1,000. I still have not gotten any of that money back. My RN license was suspended because of my conviction and my contract to be a paid provider for my handicapped daughter was terminated. That means I am losing out on almost \$10,000 a month for the next 14 years. All of these

injustices are a direct result of my possession charge from back in 2008. I want my life back, but I cannot move forward with this financial burden.

Corey Spaulding

My name is Corey Spaulding. I spent a significant amount of time in jail and prison because of Washington's unconstitutional possession laws. I was separated from everyone I loved and became depressed. I lost my cars, my residence, and a lot of money and time. I'm 37 years old and I've been walking on eggshells for 15 years. The police have used my past convictions as excuses to harass me and illegally search me, adding time to my sentences. I was working and progressing until all of that stopped and Jefferson County knocked me back down. I spent thousands on LFOs, probably close to \$10,000. The County has only paid me \$800 for some court fines, but that isn't even close to what I've spent on these convictions that I never should have had in the first place. I may not be able to get all of that time back, but I hope I can at least get back some of the money that was unlawfully taken from me.

Virginia Mae Dickerson

My name is Virginia Mae Dickerson. My charges for simple possession in Benton, Franklin, and Spokane Counties have been vacated and some of my money has been returned, but the state still has not paid me back in full despite admitting that these laws were unconstitutional. The interest on my fines was 12%. It would have taken me 28 years to pay off \$6,800 at \$50 a month if they had not stopped debtor's prisons. \$30 of those \$50 immediately went to Benton and Franklin County funds, and the last \$20 were applied to the principle of the fine.

I was incarcerated and stayed incarcerated because of the interest alone. Many of us sat in county jail at \$30 a day. I was faced with the choice of feeding my children, paying rent, or paying fines so I wouldn't get taken to jail. Some of us lost our children to the state because we were incarcerated for non-payment. It was only after the ACLU filed a lawsuit that the authorities presented us with forms to even see what our monthly expenses were. Still, we were charged 50 cents a page to obtain those forms. I was one of three individuals who testified in front of our state legislature to stop debtors' prisons, but I still have not received full compensation for what Washington State put me through. I can go on and on, but I am just waiting for someone to make it right. This is not America.

Billy Dale Anderson

My name is Billy Dale Anderson. I was released from prison in Clark County in October of 2000 and have been making LFO payments as best as I can since then. Still, I have been picked up on warrants for nonpayment many times over the last 22 years. Each time, the authorities would transport me across the state from Okanogan County to Clark County. Each time, I was released very early in the morning or very late at night, and I would have to walk back across the state to get home. I have lost jobs because of these unconstitutional arrests, and they caused my wife and step children a lot of undue stress. My family and I deserve relief from the LFOs that I've been unfairly charged. I still have not been reimbursed for those LFOs.

Michael Brown

My name is Michael Brown. While I served time for an unconstitutional possession of narcotics charge, the government took LFOS out of every monthly "paycheck" for work and credits I earned up from up to 28 cents or 84 cents an hour. I still have not been reimbursed any of those LFOs. I was incarcerated in Cowlitz County for a conviction that has now been deemed illegal, and I should receive the wages I lost to the state in that time. Every day I served in jail and prison got in the way of my employment and family obligations. I got divorced, became estranged from my children, and am now homeless all because of my illegal incarceration. My experience caused me mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

Larammie Swett

My name is Larammie Swett. I was one of the first people to contact Benton County Jail to have my case evaluated to see if I could get refunded for the LFOs I paid. I spent roughly \$5,000 on court fines, and Benton County has offered to pay me back that amount, but they refuse to pay me a dime of my LFOs. I was booked about 60 times and my LFOs are in the realm of tens of thousands of dollars. I've served a significant amount of time in jail, at least three or four hundred days. I should never have had to spend all that time in jail, and Benton County should pay me back for the money it took from me.

Tina Woods

My name is Tina Woods and I would like to share about my LFO experience in Kitsap County where all of my charges and convictions were from. I actually had my criminal record vacated prior to the Blake decision so I had to submit a motion to substitute on those charges so that I would be eligible for a refund of LFO money I had paid. I was able to get the money paid directly to the Kitsap clerks office refunded, but when I asked about the money I had paid to Dynamic Collections I was informed they would only refund any funds paid to them. I also have two possession charges from my first conviction in 2000 where one was Blake eligible but the other was not. I asked if I would get a partial refund on any money that had been paid on those charges and they stated no which I don't think is right. They were two separate arrests on different dates. I was just sentenced for both at the same time. Their reasoning is that regardless of the Blake charge there is still another drug charge which the funds would need to be paid.

Amy Bonner

My felony drug possession charge in Clark County was recently vacated, and the County recently sent me a check for \$800 but I believe that I am owed more than that. The money I needed to pay rent instead went towards my bail bonds and supervision costs. As a result, I could not pay my rent, I became homeless, and I could not afford effective counsel for my child custody matter related to my drug possession charge. I should not have to had to pay LFOs on charges that were unconstitutional for the state to bring in the first place, and I should be reimbursed for the LFOs that I have already paid.

Elizabeth Washburn

My name is Elizabeth Washburn. I was convicted in Benton County in 2001 for felony possession of a controlled substance. In December of 2021, my felony was vacated. I called the County several times to receive reimbursement for LFOs I paid, but I didn't get a response. I endured 20 years of mental, physical, and emotional damage that I never should have had to experience in the first place. I've paid around \$2,800 or \$3,000 in LFOs. I had to take out a loan to pay these ridiculous fees. It is high time Benton County returned this money to me. This conviction has ruined my life. People looked at me different, I couldn't get certain jobs, and I couldn't even rent from certain places. This conviction really affected my son, more than anything.

Windee James

My name is Windee James. I was convicted for simple drug charges in Thurston County. I did 28 months on my first drug charge in 2013. I got my charges vacated, but the county said they didn't owe me anything. But I paid \$120 per week to participate in drug court. Then, after I was convicted, they charged me drug task force fees. I must've paid close to \$5000 on that. I'll be in debt for the rest of my life trying to pay for the time I spent in jail unless Washington State repays me.