



WARRANT AMNESTY PROGRAMS

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ISSUE

Describe warrant amnesty programs in other states.

SUMMARY

We were unable to find a comprehensive list of warrant amnesty programs. However, we identified several recent examples of warrant amnesty programs operated by local courts throughout the country. Generally, these programs are for individuals with outstanding arrest warrants for failure to appear in court for traffic offenses and certain other non-violent offenses. Individuals who participate in the amnesty program avoid arrest on the warrant and instead their case proceeds to disposition (for example, the individual pays the underlying fine or participates in a diversion program). Individuals must apply for the program by appearing at the court during the designated amnesty period. The programs run for a limited time; some of the programs operate periodically.

News reports and court websites describe examples of these programs in several courts throughout the country. Following is information on three such programs.

Additionally, California passed legislation in 2015 creating a statewide traffic and infraction amnesty program, to run from October 1, 2015 through March 31, 2017. The program offers eligible individuals a discount on certain unpaid tickets and the opportunity to reinstate their driver's licenses if applicable. More information on the program appears below.

EXAMPLES OF LOCAL WARRANT AMNESTY PROGRAMS

Atlanta, Georgia

Atlanta Municipal Court offered a [warrant amnesty program](#) from April 1, 2016 through May 13, 2016. According to a [press release](#), the program offered "amnesty to individuals facing arrest and other penalties due to delinquent traffic tickets, city ordinance or misdemeanor violations[.]"



The program applied to outstanding warrants issued before January 1, 2015. Under the program, eligible warrants were cancelled. The program also waived contempt fees for failure to appear in court.

To participate in the program, an individual had to register in court. The case could then proceed to disposition (for example, the individual could pay the fine or participate in a diversionary program if eligible).

St. Louis, Missouri

In October 2016, St. Louis Municipal Court offered a two-week [warrant recall](#) “to help reschedule court dates for people who have warrants for failing to show up to court.” The program was for individuals with non-violent, municipal warrants. The program was not available for state charges.

Individuals seeking to participate had to appear at court. During the two-week period, the court offered extended hours and two temporary satellite locations.

Tucson, Arizona

According to an online *Arizona Daily Star* [article](#), Tucson City Court held a “warrant day” on August 8, 2015, to help reduce a backlog of 40,000 warrants. Most of the warrants were for failure to appear in court for minor offenses.

Individuals seeking to participate had to go to court on the designated day. They had the opportunity to speak to a prosecutor, and a public defender if necessary, to discuss a plea deal. The judge would set the conditions of release so the participants could resolve the underlying charge, such as by attending counseling or paying fines.

CALIFORNIA TRAFFIC AND INFRACTION AMNESTY PROGRAM

In 2015, California enacted legislation establishing a one-time amnesty program for traffic tickets and certain infraction tickets ([Cal. Vehicle Code § 42008.8](#)). Individual courts and counties also have the option of extending the program to certain misdemeanor violations of the Vehicle Code. The program began on October 1, 2015 and runs through March 31, 2017.

The legislation’s stated purposes are to (1) provide relief to individuals in violation of certain court-ordered obligations, or who had their driving privileges suspended for promise to appear violations; (2) provide increased revenue by encouraging payment of old fines; and (3) allow courts and counties “to resolve older delinquent cases and focus limited resources on collections for more recent cases” (Id. § 42008.8(a)).

The program offers eligible individuals a 50% or 80% discount on qualifying unpaid tickets. To qualify for the 80% discount, the individual must certify that he or she received specified public benefits or has monthly income that is 125% or below the current federal poverty guidelines. The program also offers participants with suspended driver's licenses the opportunity to have the licenses reinstated. In addition to any reduced fines, participants may be required to pay a \$50 program fee.

The program applies to individuals who failed to make a payment after September 30, 2015 for fines that were due to be paid on or before January 1, 2013. Individuals who made a payment after September 30, 2015 are not eligible for a reduction for that ticket but may be eligible to have their driver's license reinstated.

The program is available for adult vehicle code and non-vehicle code infractions and vehicle code misdemeanors with specified exceptions. It is also available for juvenile vehicle code and non-vehicle code infractions. There are certain restrictions on participating, such as that the individual must not owe restitution to a victim on any case within the county where the violation occurred.

For more details on the program, see the California judicial branch [website](#) and the program [guidelines](#).

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