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**ArchCity Defenders teams with Arnold & Porter to file largest debtors' prisons case in history against against 13 towns neighboring Ferguson**  
ArchCity Defenders announces further commitment to legal justice for St Louis County residents on two year anniversary of Mike Brown's murder

St. Louis, MO (August 9, 2016) -- ArchCity Defenders has partnered with Arnold & Porter, an international D.C. based law firm, to file a federal class action lawsuit against thirteen municipalities in St. Louis County, MO. This lawsuit alleges a coordinated, systematic effort by Defendants, through police and courts, to jail people for their poverty and deprive thousands of St. Louis residents of their rights under the U.S. Constitution.

"Poor people and black people have been saying it for years: this isn't about public safety; it's about racism and money, and it's not just Ferguson. This lawsuit brings further attention to the racially charged and discriminatory money-making scheme established and enforced within St. Louis County. Before Mike Brown's murder and after it, municipalities have exploited low-income communities of color to make payroll, through issuing traffic tickets, like 'Failure to Signal' and jailing people for their inability to pay on those tickets," said Thomas Harvey, Executive Director of ArchCity Defenders. "In partnering with Arnold & Porter, our goal is to bring an end to debtors' prisons in St. Louis and set a regional precedent that ends the policies and practices that keep these cages at capacity."

In addition to suing thirteen municipalities simultaneously, this class action alleges that these towns conspire together to advance this debtors' prison scheme by using the City of St. Ann's jail.

In *Bearden v. Georgia* (1983) the Supreme Court decided it was illegal to jail people for their poverty, or their inability to pay the fines associated with their crime. However, these municipalities disregard the law and have perpetuated violations of individual's First, Fourth, Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment rights.

Due to the predatory and unlawful actions of defendant towns, Plaintiffs have lost more than a sense of safety- but also their time, jobs, vehicles, housing and more. The municipalities and court systems are more concerned with making money than administering justice or protecting

residents. Among the litany of unconstitutional practices, Plaintiffs in the case have been denied indigency hearings, have negotiated their bond with jailers and have been subjected to inhumane jail conditions. These systemic practices have caused irreparable damage to the Plaintiffs and their family members. As such, Plaintiffs are seeking injunctive, declaratory and compensatory relief from this lawsuit. A class action of this scope implicates the lives of tens of thousands of individuals and if successful, this litigation will set a precedent throughout the region and the nation.

Earlier today, [ArchCity Defenders filed a malicious prosecution case](#) against the City of Ferguson and Stephanie Karr, on behalf of four Ferguson protestors who were arrested, jailed, prosecuted and acquitted - all without a lawful charge. In Ferguson and in the St. Louis region, ArchCity Defenders continues to see and represent individuals whose civil rights have been violated.

In the past two years, ArchCity Defenders has represented hundreds of individual clients through holistic legal representation as well as brought impact litigation against the City of St. Ann, Velda City, Florissant, Ferguson and Jennings, and others for persistent and egregious violations of residents' civil rights.

[ArchCity Defenders](#) is non-profit civil rights law firm providing holistic legal advocacy and combating the criminalization of poverty and state violence against poor people and people of color.

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## Cut outs

A likely scenario for how this operates is as follows:

Police officers in defendant towns pull over a resident for a minor traffic violation, for example, a broken taillight, and run the driver's record. If the person's record indicates outstanding debts and warrants from previous traffic violations, the officer arrests the individual and takes her to the municipality where she has a warrant out. Since the municipalities implicated in the lawsuit are so small, plaintiffs in the suit have been taken to St. Ann, and later been stuck with a board bill. The lawsuit alleges that these towns use St. Ann to continue their unconstitutional practices, have targeted poor people and communities of color, abused their governmental authority and violated individuals' rights to due process and equal protection under the law, all for the sake of generating revenue.