



DEBT FREE JUSTICE FOR KIDS

Juvenile legal system costs, fees, and fines undermine public safety, harm youth and families, and create economic and racial disparities. The Debt Free Justice Campaign is a national collaboration of individuals, organizations, and communities to abolish these fees and fines.

What are juvenile fees and fines?

At every point in the system, a young person or their parents or guardians can face financial obligations such as administrative court costs, diversion program costs, behavioral health assessments fees, electronic ankle monitor costs, detention and probation supervision fees, and even the cost of their own public defender or prosecutor.¹

Why abolish fees and fines?

FEES AND FINES HARM YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Every state prioritizes positive interventions for youth in the juvenile legal system, but fees and fines undercut positive development. Children don't have money to pay; placing an impossible financial burden on them to pay undermines youth development² and pushes children deeper into the juvenile legal system.³ Requiring parents to pay leads to family tension, interfering with the positive support children need.⁴

FEES AND FINES UNDERMINE PUBLIC SAFETY

Juvenile fees actually *increase* recidivism. One Pennsylvania study found that the higher the financial obligation, the more likely a youth was to reoffend.⁵ A Florida study reaffirmed this finding and revealed that the youth and families least likely able to pay were more likely to be assigned higher fees.⁶

FEES AND FINES DON'T MAKE FISCAL SENSE

Collection costs often outweigh the revenue for juvenile fees. Oregon, for example, spent \$866,000 to collect \$864,000 in support fees for youth in custody. Similarly, Santa Clara County spent \$450,000 to

¹ Jessica Feierman, et al., Juvenile Law Center, *Debtors' Prison For Kids?: The High Cost of Fines & Fees in the Juvenile Justice System* 10 (2016).

² Alex R. Piquero & Wesley G. Jennings, *Research Note: Justice System-Imposed Financial Penalties Increase the Likelihood of Recidivism in a Sample of Adolescent Offenders*, 15 YOUTH VIOLENCE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE, 325, 325-40 (2016).

³ Jessica Feierman, et al., Juvenile Law Center, *Debtors' Prison For Kids?: The High Cost of Fines & Fees in the Juvenile Justice System* 10 (2016).

⁴ Leslie Paik & Chiara Packard, *Impact of Juvenile Justice Fines and Fees on Family Life: Case Study in Dane County, WI.* (2019); <https://debtorsprison.jlc.org/documents/JLC-Debtors-Prison-dane-county.pdf>.

⁵ Piquero, *supra*, note 2.

⁶ Alex R. Piquero, Michael T. Baglivio, & Kevin T. Wolff, *A Statewide Analysis of the Impact of Restitution and Fees on Juvenile Recidivism in Florida Across Race & Ethnicity*, (2023). https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/content/uploads/2023/02/Piquero_et_al_Florida-juvenile-fees-study.pdf



collect less than \$400,000 from families of youth.⁷ In Louisiana, only 6% of all juvenile justice fees ordered in 2018 were ever collected. Since these studies were conducted, these states all enacted fee repeals.

FEES AND FINES EXACERBATE RACIAL DISPARITIES

Black and Brown youth are more likely to be arrested, detained, and confined than white youth.⁸ As a result, Black and Brown youth and their families are more likely to face fines and fees, continuing a cycle of harm. Outstanding debt pushes young people deeper into the system for failure to pay. Eliminating fees and fines can create more fairness in our system.

Alternatives work

A GROWING NUMBER OF STATES AND LOCALITIES ARE ELIMINATING THESE FEES AND FINES

Across the country, states have recognized that fees and fines harm children and families, undermine public safety, and don't help state and local budgets. In the past few years, fee and fine elimination bills – overwhelmingly bipartisan – have passed into law multiple states and localities.

2023: Status of Youth Fee & Fine Elimination

Full Abolition: Legislation repealed all youth fees AND all youth fines.

Substantial Elimination: Legislation repealed all youth fees OR all youth fines.

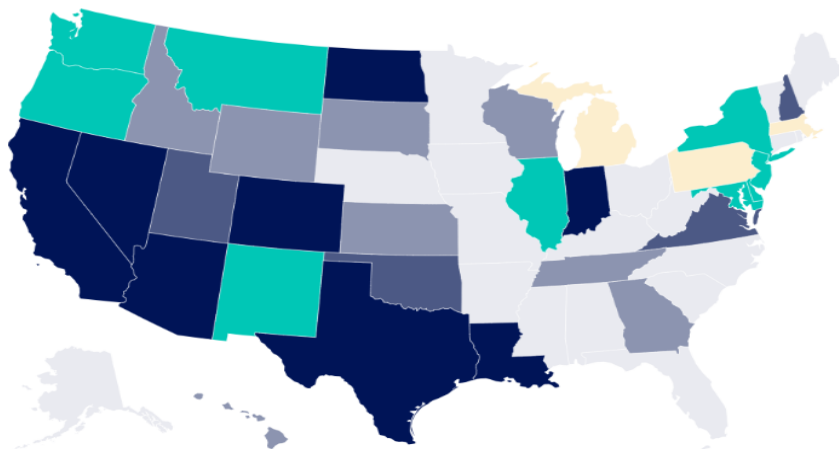
Partial Elimination: Legislation repealed at least one youth fee and/or fine.

Pending Legislation: A repeal bill was introduced and is currently pending in the legislature.

Local or Other Reform: Locality repealed at least one youth fee and/or fine or some other non-legislative repeal was enacted.

No Reform Enacted: No reform enacted at the state or local level to repeal youth fees or fines.

■ Full Abolition ■ Substantial Elimination ■ Partial Elimination ■ Local or Other Reform ■ No Reform Enacted



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Source: Debt Free Justice Campaign • Created with Datawrapper

⁷ Berkeley Law Policy Advocacy Clinic, *Making Families Pay: The Harmful, Unlawful, and Costly Practice of Charging Juvenile Administrative Fees in California* 22 (2017).

⁸ Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 2021 Juvenile Court Annual Report, <https://www.jcjc.pa.gov/Research-Statistics/Disposition%20Reports/2021%20Juvenile%20Court%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.