

Research Packet Guide and Template

This guide is part of a series of resources that were created to support community advocates in building campaigns to abolish youth fees and fines by sharing strategies from past Debt Free Justice (DFJ) campaigns. See more resources at debtfreejustice.org/resources.

This is a guide to compiling research packets to share knowledge or support legislative advocacy that includes [guidelines](#), a [checklist](#), and a [template cover page](#). If you have questions about this resource, write to info@debtfreejustice.org.

Background & Guidelines

What is a Research Packet?

- Research packets outline the literature and key points on why youth fees and fines are a problem.
- Typical items in a research packet:
 - State-specific issue or bill factsheet,
 - Other state-specific materials (publications, news articles, talking points, FAQs),
 - Executive summary or abstract pages of research publications or reports, and
 - Statements by national organizations.
- A research packet can include a cover page with an introduction and table of contents.

Where Can I See Examples of Research Packets from Other DFJ Campaigns?

- Browse debtfreejustice.org/resources to see examples of research packets used in past DFJ campaigns.

Who Receives Research Packets?

- Research packets are best geared toward audiences who could benefit from a deep dive into youth fees and fines, like bill sponsors, coalition members, and stakeholders. Depending on the audience, the tone and content may need to be tweaked.
- A research packet is commonly used when beginning to work with a new local partner and later in the campaign with legislators.

How Should a Research Packet Cover Page Be Formatted?

- Format your cover page with the goal of communicating the literature in a way that's accessible to your audience. Be sure the contents are clearly introduced and organized.
- The cover page can be formatted like a letter with a letterhead or sender's logo, the date, the recipient's address, a subject line, and a salutation (see the [template](#) below). It can also be formatted more generally without any recipient information.

Checklist: Preparing a Research Packet

- Learn from other DFJ campaigns:** Browse debtfreejustice.org/resources to see examples of research packets from past DFJ campaigns. Pay extra attention to any packets from neighboring or influential states.
- Identify the audience:** Understand who your audience is and what supporting evidence or stakeholder perspectives will be most helpful for their understanding. Consider how technical or not technical these packets should be depending on your audience.
- Identify sources for your audience:** Create a list of key publications to help your audience get up to speed on youth fees and fines and prepare to advocate for their elimination. Work with your local partners if you have them.
 - Below is a list of core publications most commonly included in DFJ research packets from past state campaigns. The [DFJ website resources page](#) lists all DFJ research sources if you're looking for additional publications.
 - [A Statewide Analysis of the Impact of Restitution and Fees on Juvenile Recidivism in Florida Across Race & Ethnicity](#) (2023)
 - [Conservative, Center-Right, and Libertarian Organizations Support Ending Fees and Fines for Youth](#) (2021)
 - [Debtor's Prison for Kids? The High Cost of Fines and Fees in the Juvenile Justice System](#) (2016)
 - [Exploitative Revenues, Law Enforcement, and the Quality of Government Service](#)
 - [Impact of Juvenile Justice Fines and Fees on Family Life: Case Study in Dane County, Wisconsin](#) (2019)
 - [Justice System-Imposed Financial Penalties Increase Likelihood of Recidivism in a Sample of Adolescent Offenders](#) (2016)
 - [Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration Recommend States Stop Charging Youth Fees and Fines](#) (2021)
 - [Making Families Pay: The Harmful, Unlawful, Costly Practice of Charging Juvenile Administrative Fees in California](#) (2017)
 - [Resolution Addressing Fines, Fees, and Costs in Juvenile Courts](#) (2018)
 - It's recommended that you only include excerpts of these sources (only the executive summary, abstract, or introduction) in your packet.
- Compile your packet:** Draft the packet cover page (see the [template](#) below), and combine all your files into a single PDF document.

Research Packet Cover Page Template

[DATE]

[RECIPIENT]

[RECIPIENT TITLE]

[RECIPIENT ADDRESS]

RE: [SUBJECT - ex: Eliminating Youth Fees and Fines in STATE]

Dear [NAME],

Thank you so much for your willingness to [work with us on OR learn more about OR be our lead bill sponsor for] eliminating youth fees and fines in [STATE]. We look forward to working with you as we push this effort forward to create meaningful change for youth and families impacted by the juvenile legal system. Below is a brief introduction to the problem and a list of helpful research and attachments that provide additional context.

[List entities that impose youth fees and fines - ex: State courts, tribal courts, and the juvenile prison system] in [STATE] can impose fines and fees on youth. National research shows that fines and fees have many negative impacts, namely that they disproportionately impact low-income youth and youth of color. Furthermore, youth fees and fines weaken family ties, increase system involvement, and are inefficient revenue streams — ultimately, there is no evidence that they support any of the stated goals of a juvenile court.

Judges, legislators, and other decision-makers are taking notice. Since 2015, youth fees and fines have been reduced or eliminated in [## - check [DFJ impact map](#)] states, including [list neighboring or influential states].

This packet includes resources and excerpts from key research detailing why we should fully eliminate youth fees and fines ([##] pages total).

1. **[State-specific issue or bill factsheet, ([YEAR], [#] page(s))**
One sentence description.]
2. **[Other state-specific resources, ([YEAR], [#] page(s))**
One sentence description.]
3. **[Key research publications/reports and national statements, ([YEAR] [executive summary, introduction, and/or abstract], [#] page(s))**
One sentence description.]