



MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Committee on Civil Rights, Judiciary, and Public Safety and House Committee on Criminal Justice

FROM: Anne Kuhnen, Kids Count Policy Director, Michigan League for Public Policy

DATE: September 19, 2023

RE: Support for House Bills 4634-4637 and Senate Bills 428-431

The Michigan League for Public Policy supports the work of Michigan's bipartisan Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform and their recommendation to eliminate most non-restitution fees and costs associated with juvenile justice system involvement. House Bills 4634-4637 and Senate Bills 428-431 are an essential step in reducing racial and economic disparities in our criminal justice system and improving outcomes for justice-involved youth in Michigan.

The assessment of fines and fees on youth are harmful for kids and their families. Courts can presently assess fees on young people and their families for diversion program costs, court costs, attorney fees, fees for court-ordered DNA assessments and late fees, but collection rates remain very low as youth are ill-equipped to pay. With a youth unemployment rate of 61%, the costs often fall on families, who can have their wages garnished and tax returns intercepted to cover the costs of juvenile justice involvement.

While youth unemployment rates are already high across the board, young people with justice involvement face even greater barriers to self-sufficiency through reduced job eligibility and lower earning potential. Fines and fees only further trap youth and families with low incomes in a cycle of debt, in some cases criminalizing poverty by extending a child's probation term for unpaid supervision fees.

Juvenile fines and fees are an inefficient and inequitable way to fund essential public services. How we choose to raise revenue speaks to our values, and the cost of funding our public services should not fall primarily on children and their families. A highly regressive revenue source, criminal fees fall most heavily on families with the lowest incomes and disproportionately on people of color. Michigan should shift to less harmful revenue sources, such as by continuing to increase the state share of the Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Fund.

Using data to educate, advocate and fight for policy solutions that undo historic and systemic racial and economic inequities to lift up Michiganders who have been left out of prosperity.

1223 TURNER STREET • SUITE G1 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48906

P: 517.487.5436 • F: 517.371.4546 • WWW.MLPP.ORG

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Eliminating juvenile fines and fees will make Michigan safer. Researchers have found higher rates of recidivism among youth assessed fees compared to those who were not. Michigan should follow the example of the growing number of states—including Arizona, Montana and Illinois in 2023—that have already adopted reforms to juvenile fines and fees in order to avoid prolonged justice involvement and expand opportunity for youth without risking public safety.

House Bills 4634-4637 and Senate Bills 428-431 are a necessary first step to begin building a more fair and equitable juvenile justice system. We support this legislation and urge the committees' passage.

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