



**Letter to Illinois General Assembly Supporting Elimination of Juvenile Fines and Fees
(SB.1463 and HB.3120)**

March 21, 2023

Dear Honorable Members of the General Assembly,

We are writing to encourage you to vote in favor of the passage of SB1463 / HB3120, eliminating juvenile fees and fines in Illinois.

Our CEO Action for Racial Equity (CEOARE) Fellowship unites the talent and resources of more than 100 signatory organizations to advance racial equity through public policy, many of whom have a significant presence in Illinois. We are responding to today's most urgent disparities impacting Black Americans countrywide. The Fellowship revolves around four platforms that are vital to advancing equity and well-being: economic empowerment, education and opportunity, healthy communities, and public safety. One of our key priorities is Decriminalizing Poverty, which includes eliminating fees and fines.

Under Illinois law, counties charge fees and fines to youth and their families at every stage of the juvenile court process, including costs for probation services, public defender services, detention costs, DNA tests and other administrative costs related to running juvenile courts.¹ Fees and fines in juvenile court range from \$25 to over \$800 and can quickly add up to thousands of dollars for a single family, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet and have no way to pay.²

Unpaid fines and fees can follow juveniles into adulthood, harming their credit and eligibility for student loans, rental leases, or car loans.³ These consequences can have negative impacts on our workforce and our economy. The juvenile justice system is meant to rehabilitate adolescents, but current juvenile fines and fees policies could have the opposite effect and can lead to increased recidivism.⁴ Moreover, these fines and fees are an inefficient source of revenue due to high collection costs and low collection rates.²

Illinois businesses are looking to foster and leverage diversity to drive innovation and business success. Juvenile court debt interferes with a young person's ability to reintegrate with their community and limits future opportunities, and recent data shows that a disproportionately higher percentage of Black youths in Illinois are arrested and detained compared to youths of any other race.⁵ Over time, these policies make it harder for businesses to hire the diverse and skilled workforce they need.

SB1463 / HB3120 provides Illinois with the opportunity to change policies that have created a cycle of debt and stress for children and their families who are struggling financially. Our justice system policies should give our children the best chance of success in life, including the chance to participate in an inclusive and sustainable workforce which can drive economic growth and development in Illinois.





CEOARE is committed to working with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to enact policies that bring equity, transparency, and accountability to our justice system. We urge you to advance SB1463 / HB3120, which will eliminate juvenile fees and fines in Illinois.

Sincerely,

CEO Action for Racial Equity

Citations

¹ Juvenile Court Act (1987), 705 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 405.

² Eliminate Juvenile Court Fines & Fees – FAQ. Debt Free Justice Illinois, 2023. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63eabf31675aec1620d12822/t/63fe7de63245f42238b85230/1677622758660/DebtFreeJustice_FAQ_2_2023.pdf.

³ Atasi Uppal, *The High Cost of “Justice”: A Snapshot of Juvenile Court Fines and Fees in Michigan* (National Center for Youth Law, August 2020), 9, <https://youthlaw.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2022-02/2020.08.13-MI-Fines-Fees-1.pdf>.

⁴ Alex Piquero and Wesley Jennings, “Justice System-Imposed Financial Penalties Increase Likelihood of Recidivism in a Sample of Adolescent Offenders,” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 15, no. 3 (September 2016): 325 – 340, https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2023-02/Piquero_et_al_AV_Fees_%26_Restitution_Report_wTables_011723.pdf

⁵ Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, “FY19 Illinois Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Compliance Plan” (March 2019), 1, https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/media/document/IL-Y18-DMC-PLAN_508.pdf.



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