



Letter to Michigan House of Representatives in support of the Juvenile Justice Bills

March 23, 2022

The Honorable Jason Wentworth, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Graham Filler, Chair, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable David LaGrand, Democratic Vice Chair, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Bronna Kahle, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Ryan Berman, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable TC Clements, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Krya Bolden, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Kelly Breen, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Donna Lasinski, Democratic Leader
The Honorable Mike Mueller, Vice Chair, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Steven Johnson, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Daire Rendon, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Douglas Wozniak, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Tenisha Yancey, Member, House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Kara Hope, Member, House Judiciary Committee

Dear Members of the Michigan House of Representatives:

We are writing to express our support for the bipartisan House Bills 4987-4991 (the “Juvenile Justice Bills”), all designed to eliminate juvenile justice fees. We respectfully ask that you schedule hearings to advance these bills, which do not change the policies for restitution, but instead focus on fees for the use of our court and justice system.

CEO Action for Racial Equity is a Fellowship of over 100 signatory organizations from across America, many of whom have significant presence in Michigan. Ranging from manufacturers to accountants, retailers and other suppliers, we mobilize business leaders with diverse expertise to advance public policy in four key areas – healthcare, education, economic empowerment and public safety. One of our key priorities is decriminalizing poverty, which includes the elimination of juvenile justice fees.

Under current Michigan law, counties charge fines and fees to youth and their families at every stage of the juvenile court process, including costs for probation services, court-appointed attorneys, diversion costs, DNA tests and other administrative costs related to running juvenile courts. Fines and fees in juvenile courts 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.^[1]

Juvenile court debt interferes with a young person’s ability to reintegrate with their community and limits future opportunities. Also, data shows that Black youth are referred to juvenile court and detained at much higher rates than white youths. For example, a 2020 study by the Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice showed that Black youth represented 17% of ten to sixteen-year-olds in Michigan, but 37% of those arrested.^[2] Over time, these juvenile court fees make it harder for businesses to hire the diverse and skilled workforce they need.





Furthermore, juvenile fees are not an efficient or reliable source of revenue and come at a high cost. Collection rates of juvenile justice fees can be very low. For example, in Macomb County, the average collection rate between 2017 and 2020 was only 4.4%^[3]. Additionally, unpaid fines and fees can follow juveniles into adulthood, harming their credit and ability to rent housing, secure loans, and find employment.^[4] These consequences act as a drag on our workforce and our economy, placing Michigan at a competitive disadvantage. The juvenile justice system is meant to rehabilitate adolescents, however, evidence shows that juvenile justice fees do not have the desired effect of rehabilitating youth. Rather, the results of these policies show that the lingering impact of unpaid fees have done the reverse and, in many cases, increased recidivism.^[5]

The Juvenile Justice Bills provide Michigan with the opportunity to address policies that have created a cycle of debt and stress for children and their families who were already 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 Michigan.

CEO Action for Racial Equity 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 hold a hearing and advance legislation that will eliminate juvenile justice fees in Michigan.

Thank you for your leadership.
Sincerely,

CEO Action for Racial Equity

CC:

Hon. Abraham Aiyash
Hon. Sarah Anthony
Hon. Felicia Brabec
Hon. Julie Brixie
Hon. Julie Calley
Hon. Brenda Carter
Hon. Tyrone Carter
Hon. Jim Elison
Hon. Rachel Hood
Hon. Padma Kuppa
Hon. Sara Lightner
Hon. Mari Manoogian
Hon. Laurie Phutsky
Hon. Ranjeev Puri
Hon. Julie Rogers
Hon. Tim Sneller
Hon. Bill Sowerby



Hon. Samantha Steckloff
Hon. Joe Tate
Hon. Shri Thanedar
Hon. Karen Whitsett

Citations

[1] Atasi Uppal. [The High Cost of “Justice”: A Snapshot of Juvenile Court Fines and Fees in Michigan](#). August 2020. National Center for Youth Law.

[2] [Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice](#), [Michigan Racial and Ethnic Disparities Data](#), Fiscal Year 2020, [Michigan 2020 Matrix](#), *Percentage of Minorities at Stages of the Juvenile Justice System, All Reporting Counties 2020* (Tab: Stacked 100%)

[3] Ibid

[4] Atasi Uppal. [The High Cost of “Justice”: A Snapshot of Juvenile Court Fines and Fees in Michigan](#). August 2020. National Center for Youth Law.

[5] [Juvenile System Imposed Financial Penalties Increase the Likelihood of Recidivism in a Sample of Adolescent Offenders](#). Final Report submitted to the Juvenile Law Center, Philadelphia, PA, Piquero, A.R., & Jennings, W.G. (2016).

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