



Eliminating Juvenile Fines & Fees in Missouri

National Center
for Youth Law

DEBT FREE
JUSTICE

Fines and fees drive youth deeper into the legal system, undermine public safety, and harm children and families. Studies show the more families pay, the more a youth is likely to recidivate.

Missouri state law authorizes the juvenile court to charge youth and their families fees related to their involvement in the juvenile court system—fees which are distinct from and additional to victim restitution. Research shows that these fees are racially discriminatory, undermine youth success, place dire financial strain on families, and provide little fiscal benefit to counties. Missouri should join the growing number of states across the country that have abolished these harmful and ineffective financial penalties.

JUVENILE COURT FEES DISPROPORTIONATELY BURDEN YOUTH OF COLOR AND THEIR FAMILIES

Nationally, Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Indigenous youth are overrepresented, overpunished, and overcharged fees in the juvenile court system. Similar disparities exist in Missouri, where youth of color are overrepresented at every stage of the juvenile court system statewide.

JUVENILE COURT FEES HARM YOUTH AND UNDERMINE THEIR ABILITY TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Contrary to the rehabilitative goals of the Missouri juvenile court, research shows that court-imposed debt interferes with a young person's ability to successfully reenter society and can limit future opportunities, which may prolong and exacerbate poverty. Even the United States Department of Justice has issued guidance advising local jurisdictions about the harmful effects of juvenile court fees.



JUVENILE COURT FEES PLACE HIGH COSTS ON VULNERABLE FAMILIES WITH LITTLE FINANCIAL BENEFIT TO COUNTIES

Research across states has also found continuous evidence that court fees are not an effective mechanism for generating revenue. Meanwhile, a young person and their family might face several hundred dollars in fees, a significant hardship for most families, especially low-income families. In Missouri, just a 10-day detention in the juvenile justice system could cost children and their youth almost \$400. Fees and fines, including detention room and board, assessment fees, filing fees, court fees, and more, can cost youth and their families up to thousands of dollars.

MISSOURI COURTS ALREADY RECOGNIZE THE HARM OF FINES AND FEES IMPOSED ON YOUTH

Many courts in Missouri do not charge and/or waive financial charges imposed upon youth and their families. Data from the Office of the State Court Administrator confirms what has been said anecdotally: courts from St. Louis County to Newton County are not charging court fines and/or fees to youth. Other courts in Missouri are taking notice. As of December 1, 2022, the juvenile court in Boone and Callaway counties has significantly reduced the fees they impose upon youth and their families.

THE NEED FOR REFORM: BY THE NUMBERS



\$722K

WAS CHARGED TO MISSOURI CHILDREN & THEIR FAMILIES IN COURT FEES FROM 2019-2022



ONLY 25%

OF COURT FEES IMPOSED ON YOUTH AND FAMILIES WERE COLLECTED IN 2021



26 STATES

HAVE ALREADY EMBRACED REFORM, INCLUDING OKLAHOMA & INDIANA