

### Michigan Juvenile Court Debt: Issue Overview

Michigan juvenile courts are permitted, and in some cases required, to charge and collect a variety of fees from youth involved in delinquency proceedings, regardless of the young person's age. Out-of-home placements, one of the many measures imposed on youth, can cost their families as much as \$320 per day. These fees can devastate a family's finances, with unpaid bills that accrue for years after the young person leaves the juvenile justice system.

Michigan juvenile court debt:

- *Disproportionately impacts Black youth and families.*
- *Is charged inconsistently, depending on geography.*
- *Is collected at negligible rates from our poorest residents.*
- *Keeps low-income youth and families in perpetual financial crisis.*

Other states have already eliminated juvenile court debt. Michigan can too!

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1. Juvenile court debt disproportionately impacts Black families in Michigan.
    - o Black youth are more likely to be arrested, detained in a secure facility, and charged with a juvenile offense in Michigan.
    - o Nearly half of Black youth in Michigan live in poverty.
    - o Increased juvenile court involvement leads to a greater financial burden on youth and families.
  2. Juvenile court fees and fines are inconsistently and unfairly imposed on Michigan families.
    - o Fees are charged and collected inconsistently across counties.
    - o Many fees are considered "discretionary," and depending on the county, courts may aggressively pursue those fees or decline to impose them at all, which leads to so-called "justice by geography."
  3. State law requires juvenile courts to seek reimbursement from youth and families for the costs of out-of-home placement, which can reach as high as \$320 per day.
    - o Poor youth and families are overwhelmed with court debt.
    - o Some low-income families interviewed by MCYJ reported debts exceeding \$100,000.
    - o Families reported having their paychecks, tax returns and even their stimulus checks garnished because of their inability to pay back the debt.
  4. While courts impose millions of dollars in fees and fines, and can spend considerable staff resources on collection, they generate limited revenue.

- o Actual debt collection rates are negligible.
- o In an assessment of several Michigan counties, collections rates were found to range from 2-11%.
- 5. Jurisdictions across the country are prioritizing juvenile court debt reform in order to advance racial and economic justice.
  - o Other states have already eliminated fines and fees.
  - o [6 states](#) have abolished some or all juvenile fees: CA, MD, OH, NH, NV, NJ and WA.
  - o 4 other states are considering legislation in 2021: AR, FL, LA, and OR.

Michigan must take action to eliminate these juvenile court fines and fees.

For more information, visit:

- o [The High Cost of Justice: A Snapshot of Juvenile Court Fines and Fees in Michigan \(National Center for Youth Law, 2020\)](#)
- o [Overdue for Justice: An Assessment of Access to and Quality of Juvenile Defense Counsel in Michigan \(National Juvenile Defender Center, 2020\)](#)