



Testimony IN SUPPORT of HB 36
Submitted to the Maryland House Judiciary Committee
January 16, 2020

On behalf of the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) a national organization dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system I am pleased to submit testimony in support of HB 36, which would reduce the onerous burden of fines and fees on children and their families in the juvenile justice system.

CFYJ works to change laws that reduce the number of youth in the adult criminal justice system while promoting more effective approaches in the juvenile justice system.

The goal of any system of justice that seeks to reduce recidivism and preserve for youth the best opportunities to become successful citizens should be to eliminate as many roadblocks to that success as possible.

Fines and fees on children and their families are a major roadblock, serve no useful purpose, and have the effect of either keeping children who cannot pay in the justice system unnecessarily, or saddling their families with debt. Both are harmful outcomes that do nothing for public safety while they, in effect, punish poverty.

In addition, these fines and fees hurt African American and Latinx families the most, and perpetuate of a cycle of poverty that I know members of this committee wish to overcome.

There is an emerging national consensus that the practice of imposing fines and fees on children and their families should be abolished. A U.S. Department of Justice Advisory published in January 2017 noted that: *"These fines and fees can be economically debilitating to children and their families and can have an enduring impact on a child's prospects."*¹

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Civil Rights, Office for Access to Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Advisory for Recipients of Financial Assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice on Levying Fines and Fees on Juveniles: Considerations for Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, and Related Statutes*, January 2017.

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE
BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

In March 2018, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) endorsed a resolution recognizing *“that court fines, fees, and costs may have a disproportionate impact on poor communities and racial or ethnic minorities and supports the adoption of court policies and practices that promote fairness and equal treatment for all youth and their families.”*²

California abolished juvenile fees in 2017 and Nevada did so last year. New Jersey has just passed a bill eliminating juvenile fines that awaits the Governor’s signature. Maryland has the opportunity to join these states in by passing HB 36. This will end a harmful policy of punishing children for their lack of resources, and will ensure that more Maryland children will have the opportunity to succeed.

I am grateful to the Committee for your effort and pleased to be a resource as you consider these issues and potential policy reforms in the state.

Thank you very much.

Brian Evans
State Campaigns Director
Campaign for Youth Justice

² *Resolution Addressing Fines, Fees, and Costs in Juvenile Courts*, Adopted by the NCJFCJ Board of Directors, March 17, 2018.