

**Testimony IN SUPPORT of HB 36**  
**Submitted to the Maryland House Judiciary Committee**  
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Good Afternoon, my name is Marcia Hopkins. I am the Senior Manager of Youth Advocacy Program and Policy at the Juvenile Law Center. Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit public interest law firm for children in the country. At Juvenile Law Center we advocate for the rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the child welfare and justice systems. Thank you to the Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony on the important issue of juvenile costs, fines, and fees.

I have the pleasure of working with young people who have been impacted by the justice system to develop strategies to push for system reform for children across the country. It is because of their stories, and hard work I am here today to testify before the committee to support the passage of House bill 36.

I am also here to represent the hard-working families in Maryland who are negatively impacted by court ordered fines, fees, and costs \_\_\_ but their stories are often unheard or overlooked.

The Department of Juvenile Services has reported that in Prince Georges County, courts impose costs in the amount of \$185.00, in Queen Anne's County, children are charged \$150.00 to 300.00 and in Worcester county \$165.00. In Anne Arundel County, courts impose costs associated with Sheriff's fees, legal fees, and a clerk's office fee.

Through conversations with colleagues in Maryland, we have heard several stories of children and families impacted by costs, fines, and fees. I'd like to share a few of their stories.

One young woman had \$465 in costs imposed on her. After her time in placement, she was released back into the care of her abusive father. She soon left to live with her aunt, which meant she had to quit her job and lost months of income. After finding a new job, she struggled to pay for rent, her GED math tutor, debts, and for food. According to her case worker, she had "Completed all of the terms of probation without any negative reports, including 100 hours of community service, electronic monitoring, the Functional Family Therapy (FFT), and the CHOICE program." Asking her to pay court costs in addition did not serve the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile justice system.

Another 16-year-old was charged \$775 for court costs because the court imposed a charge for each case, he was involved in.

A mother shared that she could not pay her bills because of her son's court costs. These are just three stories of children and families in Maryland. We know these are not the only stories.

Sociologists conducting research in other jurisdictions have found the same thing. In one study, they concluded that "the actual impacts of juvenile fines and fees on family life are so detrimental that they hinder any intended positive effects and undermine any trust in the juvenile justice system."

We have a real opportunity in the state of Maryland to continue to improve the lives of our children and families by passing this bill. We should work to create a justice system that works to help children, not one that punishes children for their indigence and families for living in poverty. Children should never be pushed deeper into the justice system for failure to pay. As advocates, and law makers, we have an obligation to collectively think about and implement laws, policies, and practices that will help children learn from their mistakes and grow. Please consider these young people's stories and their families when you go to vote for this bill.

Thank you.