



PRESS RELEASE

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ALAMEDA COUNTY WILL VOTE TO END ASSESSMENT OF AND DISCHARGE \$26 MILLION IN ADULT FEES

Newly-formed Debt Free Justice California coalition calls on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to put an end to this form of county-sanctioned wealth-extraction and bring about “Debt-Free Justice” for communities.

Oakland, CA —Tomorrow, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors will vote on whether to end the assessment and collection of fees imposed on individuals in the criminal justice system.

Currently Alameda County charges fees for probation supervision (\$90/month), investigation reports (\$710/case), representation by the public defender (\$150+/case), and participation in the Sheriff’s Work Alternative Program (\$65 + \$12/day). The average adult on probation in Alameda County spends five years under supervision and can face over \$6,000 in fees.

A [white paper](#) released last month by the East Bay Community Law Center outlined how these fees inflict harm on low-income defendants by perpetuating poverty and creating additional barriers to employment, housing, and reentry. And because people of color are arrested and punished disproportionately, communities of color bear a much heavier burden of the costs.

According to Aminah Colbert from LSPC/All of Us or None, “It is the idea that when individuals are released from jails and prisons that they would secure employment, contribute to the community, and live a law-abiding lifestyle. However, the burden of being weighed down immediately upon reentry, coupled with the many other collateral consequences system impacted folks face, actually serve to lure folks back into incarceration.”

This resolution would end the assessment of fees going forward and put a halt to collection on all previously assessed fees. In a joint letter, Chief Probation Officer Wendy Still, Public Defender Brendon Woods, Auditor-Controller Steve Manning, and Sheriff Gregory Ahearn noted that: “Criminal justice financial obligations can have long-term effects that significantly harm the efforts of formerly incarcerated people to rehabilitate and reintegrate, thus compromising key principles of fairness in the administration of justice in a democratic society and engendering deep distrust of the criminal justice system among those overburdened by them.”

Brandon Greene, author of the white paper, called the resolution, “a huge step forward for racial justice in Alameda County and proof of concept that the kind of reform called for by [Debt Free Justice California](#), a multi-regional California-based coalition focused on putting a stop to the unfair ways the criminal legal system drains wealth from vulnerable communities, is possible.

Researchers also found that adult fees generate little revenue after taking collection costs into consideration. For example, in fiscal year 2017-18, the Probation Department, Public Defender’s Office, and Sheriff’s Office collected over \$1.3 million in adult fees but the Auditor-Controller’s Office estimated spending nearly \$300,000 of that revenue on collections.

Stephanie Campos-Bui, a contributor to the white paper, said “Across the country, local governments, constrained by shrinking budgets, have passed the costs of running the criminal justice system onto defendants and their families by charging fines, fees and costs. But slowly more and more jurisdictions are beginning to realize that these fees are just a regressive tax on some of our most vulnerable communities.”

Theresa Zhen, author of the white paper, noted that “San Francisco County discharged over \$37 million in adult fees this last June. By passing this resolution, Alameda can once again serve as a leader in the state with a debt-free justice system.”

If moved tomorrow the Board resolution would face a second reading on December 4th and if passed go into effect January 4, 2019.

Eric Henderson from the Ella Baker Center says, “when passed, these resolutions will be monumental wins for low-income residents and communities of color in Alameda County. Eliminating these fees are a step in the right direction to eliminating a huge burden for people who have contact with the criminal justice system.”

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The [East Bay Community Law Center](#) is the largest provider of free legal services in the East Bay and trains future attorneys to be skilled and principled advocates committed to finding innovative solution to the cause and conditions of poverty.

The [Ella Baker Center for Human Rights](#) works locally, statewide, and nationally to shift resources away from prisons and punishment and towards opportunities that make our communities safe, healthy, and strong.

The [Insight Center for Community Economic Development](#) is a national research and economic justice organization working to ensure that all people become and remain economically secure.

The [Justice Reinvestment Coalition](#) is committed to creating a fair and just public safety system based on effective practices that invest in our communities, our families, and our people.

[Legal Services for Prisoners with Children](#) organizes communities impacted by the criminal justice system and advocates to release incarcerated people, to restore human and civil rights and to reunify families and communities.

[The Policy Advocacy Clinic](#) at UC Berkeley School of Law trains law and public policy students to pursue non-litigation strategies to address systemic racial, economic, and social injustice.