



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**CALIFORNIA ABOLISHES REGRESSIVE AND RACIALLY DISCRIMINATORY JUVENILE LEGAL SYSTEM FEES**

SACRAMENTO— Today California Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law [Senate Bill 1290](#) (SB 1290), a bipartisan juvenile justice reform bill that outlaws the collection of administrative fees that disproportionately extract wealth from low-income, Black and Latinx families.

Previously, local courts and probation departments across the state imposed fees on families for their child's involvement in the juvenile system, including fees for legal representation by a public defender and daily fees for food, clothing, and health care when youth were detained in juvenile halls.

According to the bill's co-author, Senator Maria Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles), "The passage of SB 1290 marks the full abolition of juvenile fees in California. The harmful, costly, and frequently unlawful practice of collecting these administrative fees causes devastating and lasting harm to low-income families, while providing little net revenue for counties."

In 2018 California ended the assessment of all new juvenile fees with the passage of [Senate Bill 190](#), after [research](#) by the U.C. Berkeley School of Law Policy Advocacy Clinic documented how fees push youth further into the system and trap families in cycles of debt. Because of systemic racism throughout the juvenile system, even after controlling for underlying offense, researchers found that families of Black and Latinx youth were liable for higher fees than families of white youth.

Forty-three of California's 58 counties had gone beyond what was previously mandated by the state and voluntarily ended collections on over \$346 million in outstanding juvenile fees. The 15 remaining counties will now be required to discharge approximately \$15 million in outstanding fees by the end of the year.

The passage of SB 1290 also formally ends the collection of fees for home supervision, electronic monitoring, and drug testing for young people under age 21 in the criminal system. This complements the historic passage of California's [Assembly Bill 1869](#), a budget trailer bill championed by Budget Chairwoman Holly J. Mitchell that abolishes 23 administrative fees in the criminal system for people of all ages. AB 1869 was signed on Friday, September 18, 2020.

Anthony Robles with the Youth Justice Coalition of Los Angeles, a co-sponsor of the bill, noted that, "While the California legal system still extracts wealth from over-policed communities through fines and restitution, we are leading the nation in fee reform by eliminating these taxes that keep low-income families and communities of color in a vicious cycle of poverty and punishment. We hope that organizers, advocates, and lawmakers across the country can use our almost decade-long grassroots campaign as an example as they fight for debt-free justice in their own communities."

Co-sponsor Jessica Bartholow with Western Center on Law & Poverty added that, “the elimination of all juvenile fees and many adult fees is an important step toward divesting community resources away from the carceral system and keeping those dollars in the hands of families and in their communities where they are desperately needed right now. Fees unjustly force communities that are targeted by racist policing and punished by a racist carceral system to directly pay for that violence against them.”

Earlier this year, [Maryland](#) similarly abolished juvenile fees and [Nevada](#) outlawed charging juvenile fees. Additional states, including Colorado, Louisiana, and Oregon, are considering taking legislative action to end this regressive and racially discriminatory practice.

“California was the first state in the nation to look at the data and acknowledge the high pain and low gain of juvenile fees,” said Stephanie Campos-Bui with the UC Berkeley Law Policy Advocacy Clinic. “It is really exciting to see the fight for debt-free justice expand into so many other states and even get attention at the federal level.”

Last spring, California Congressman Tony Cárdenas introduced the [Ending Debtor’s Prison For Kids Act](#) (H.R. 2300), which offers funding for mental and behavioral services to states that eliminate fees associated with the juvenile justice system.

“The passage of SB 1290 in California is another step in our fight to end the cruel practice of collecting fines and fees that keep children in jail and American families in debt”, said Congressman Tony Cárdenas. “Similar to SB 1290, my bill, Eliminating Debtor's Prison for Kids Act (H.R. 2300), introduced in the U.S. Congress, will help states across the country, including California, end the burdensome costs, fines, and fees associated with the juvenile justice system which perpetuates this unfair cycle of juvenile incarceration. I hope other states follow California's lead and end this harmful practice so we can focus on fostering healthier outcomes for our young people and provide all children with a second chance at a better life.”

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