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U.S. Representative Tony Cárdenas Introduces Package of Juvenile Justice Reform Initiatives

Advocacy organizations applaud the bills' introduction, urging members of Congress to support

Washington, DC (July 28, 2021) – Today, U.S. Representative Tony Cárdenas (D-CA) introduced a package of juvenile justice reform legislation in the House. The bills include the Eliminating Debtor's Prison for Kids Act, Community-Based Gang Intervention Act, and Protecting Miranda Rights for Kids Act. Organizations supporting the abolition of juvenile fees and fines nationwide applaud this move and hailed the introduction of the Eliminating Debtor's Prison for Kids Act, which provides federal grants for behavioral and mental health for youth to states that end juvenile system fees.

"The Eliminating Debtor's Prison for Kids Act is an important step towards ensuring debt free justice in our juvenile justice systems," said Nadia Mozaffar, Senior Attorney at Juvenile Law Center. "We thank Representative Cárdenas for his leadership on this bill which will incentivize states to eliminate harmful juvenile system fees and provide resources to help states create more robust mental health services for youth."

In the last few years, a groundswell of support has grown in the states to abolish the harmful practice of assessing fees to young people involved in the juvenile system. Just this year, Louisiana, New Mexico, Virginia, Colorado, Oregon, and Texas have reduced or eliminated juvenile fees and fines. The federal bill will further speed the pace of change on this important issue.

According to Devan Shea, Deputy Director of the Policy Advocacy Clinic at UC Berkeley School of Law, "Fees and fines put additional stress on already vulnerable families, especially Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth who are over-policed and over-punished in the juvenile system. This bill is a win-win that encourages states to end this harmful practice in exchange for vital resources to support young people who need it most."

Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced companion legislation on the Senate side. He has worked on a host of juvenile and criminal justice reform efforts in his tenure.

Nadia Mozaffar and Devan Shea are available for comment and interview.

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. For more information about Juvenile Law Center’s work, visit www.JLC.org.

The Policy Advocacy Clinic at Berkeley Law pursues non-litigation strategies to address systemic racial, economic, and social injustice. The Clinic supports local and state change campaigns to abolish regressive and racially discriminatory fees and fines in the juvenile and criminal legal systems.

The National Juvenile Defender Center is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting justice for all children by ensuring excellence in juvenile defense. NJDC provides support to public defenders, appointed counsel, law school clinical programs, and non-profit law centers to ensure quality representation in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal areas.

The National Center for Youth Law is a non-profit law firm that helps low-income children achieve their potential by transforming the public agencies that serve them. NCYL leads high impact campaigns that weave together litigation, research, public awareness, policy development, and technical assistance.

The Fines and Fees Justice Center is a national advocacy organization working to create a justice system that treats individuals fairly, ensures public safety and community prosperity, and is funded equitably. FFJC works collaboratively with affected communities and justice system stakeholders to eliminate fees in the justice system, ensure fines are equitably imposed, and end abusive collection practices.

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