



COLORADO JUVENILE DEFENDER CENTER
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Colorado Juvenile Defender Center, ACLU of Colorado, Stand for Children Colorado, and Colorado Criminal Defense Bar Celebrate Bill Ending Juvenile Fees, Bringing #DebtFreeJustice to Colorado Youth

Denver, CO (Tuesday, July 6, 2021) – Today, Governor Jared Polis signs House Bill 1315, a bipartisan juvenile system reform bill that will provide relief to thousands of Colorado families by ending the harmful and unfair practice of charging fees and costs to youth involved in the juvenile system. The bill also forgives nearly \$58 million in outstanding juvenile fee debt.

H.B. 1315 was co-sponsored by Representatives Leslie Herod (D-Denver) and Matt Soper (R – Delta, Mesa), and Senators Julie Gonzales (D-Denver) and Dominick Moreno (D-Adams).

"I am thrilled that House Bill 1315 passed," said Julissa Soto, a community leader and a mother who was impacted by juvenile fees. "This will benefit Colorado's children and their families, especially families of color. These fees were a financial burden, not only to the youth but also to their parents. They were just one more way to oppress our communities of color."

"We applaud the Governor and lawmakers from both parties for ending this counterproductive and regressive system, relieving thousands of families of crushing debt and allowing our state to focus on what really matters: supporting victims, investing in youth services, and helping Colorado's most vulnerable kids succeed and thrive," said Krista Spurgin, Executive Director of Stand for Children Colorado.

Prior to the passage of H.B. 1315, state law authorized courts to charge administrative fees and costs to children in the juvenile system and their parents. These fees and costs averaged about \$300 per case and could total thousands of dollars, which many families struggled to pay off. Fees and costs disproportionately burdened Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children, who are overrepresented in Colorado's juvenile system, and children in rural districts, where courts most aggressively charged fees.

“The majority of young people in the delinquency system are indigent and assessing court fees and costs only created additional financial burdens for their families,” noted Michael Juba, Board Chair of the Colorado Juvenile Defender Center (CJDC). “The assessment of these fees and costs served no rehabilitative purpose, and many times were converted into civil judgments against young people, which created additional barriers to success as they entered adulthood. CJDC appreciates the commonsense conclusion that we should remove barriers to success for young people in the court system.”

Denise Maes, Public Policy Director of the ACLU of Colorado added, “Fees hurt kids and families, with unfair impact on families of color and families without means. We are grateful to the sponsors, the General Assembly, and the Governor for keeping Colorado at the forefront of juvenile system reform.”

H.B. 1315 uses marijuana tax cash fund money to support the restorative justice fund, crime victim compensation fund, and victim’s assistance and law enforcement fund. The bill immediately ends collection on previously assessed fees and costs and vacates court orders that imposed the costs.

Stacie Nelson Colling, Juvenile Defense Coordinator of the Colorado Office of the Alternate Defense Counsel explained, “Not only were these fees were a huge burden for most families, they were an inefficient and unsustainable source of revenue for the court system. Data from the State Judicial Branch showed that Colorado spent as much as \$0.75 for every \$1.00 it collected in juvenile fees and costs. H.B. 1315 sets up a more stable revenue stream for critical services, like victim supports and restorative justice.”

Colorado becomes the sixth state this year and twelfth state overall to reduce or eliminate juvenile fees or fines as part of a growing national movement, the Debt Free Justice Campaign. The [Debt Free Justice Campaign](#) is a national campaign to end fees and fines imposed on youth in the justice system.