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Monetary Sanctions and Court Fees Are Counterproductive to the Goals of Juvenile Justice

Each year, an estimated 1 million youth enter juvenile courts. In nearly every state, juveniles and their families may encounter a host of fines, fees, and court costs. Empirical research demonstrates that these monetary sanctions and court costs fail to achieve the goals of reducing reoffending and raising revenue. In fact, there is growing evidence that legal financial obligations are associated with higher rates of recidivism among juvenile offenders.

What kinds of legal financial obligations are imposed on juveniles and their families?

- **Fines** are primarily intended to deter and punish crime. They are usually set in statute and vary depending on the severity of an offense. Fines are appropriate and beneficial in the adult justice system when used as an intermediate form of punishment in lieu of incarceration.
- **Fees and Court Costs** are used to generate revenue rather than for punishment or restitution. In this sense, fees shift the costs of the justice system away from taxpayers and onto defendants, effectively charging individuals for their constitutional right to due process.

What are the harms of fines, fees, and court costs imposed on juveniles and their families?

- Failure to pay fines, fees, and court costs can result in probation violations, exclusion from expungement and record sealing programs, incarceration, and driver's license suspensions.
- A 2019 report from the Juvenile Law Center found that the financial burdens imposed on juveniles disproportionately affect lower-income families and can create tensions among family members that are counterproductive to rehabilitation.

Do fines, fees, and court costs reduce reoffending or raise revenue?

- Research suggests that fines, fees, and court costs are not effective mechanisms to reduce reoffending in juvenile cases. In fact, a 2016 study published in *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, found that the imposition of legal financial obligations is associated with higher rates of recidivism among juveniles.
- A 2017 report from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law's Policy Advocacy Clinic revealed that a large share of legal financial obligations levied in juvenile cases go unpaid due to financial hardship. Yet governments dedicate substantial resources to unsuccessful collection efforts, in some cases resulting in a net loss to taxpayers.

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