



For Immediate Release

Contacts: Courtney McKinney, Western Center on Law and Poverty, (916) 282-5116; Brandon Greene, East Bay Community Law Center, (702) 606-3068; Anthony Robles, Youth Justice Coalition, (626) 838-9450; and, Aila Ferguson, Homeboy Industries, (415) 625-7046.

SACRAMENTO (March 27, 2019): Today, Senate Bill 144, introduced by Senator Holly J. Mitchell, was amended with text that will end the assessment and collection of administrative fees imposed against people in the criminal justice system. By doing so, it would dramatically reduce the economic hardships caused by court-ordered debt and enhance the economic security of system-involved populations, their families and their communities. SB 144 will usher in an era of criminal justice policy that does not rely on stripping wealth from communities of color and low-income communities. The Debt Free Justice Coalition is sponsoring the legislation and has issued the following statements:

"Our communities are buckling under the weight of these fines and fees. We're going to be relentless in our fight to end this burdensome practice so that our people can live free."

- Susan Burton, A New Way of Life

"Criminal justice administrative fees are racist, regressive taxes upon women and Black and Brown communities, stripping families of money, security, and freedom. SB 144 would repeal these Jim Crow-style barriers to justice and reentry and allow our communities a greater opportunity to thrive."

- Aila Ferguson, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children/ All Of Us Or None

"Excessive criminal fees hinder successful reintegration into society. One study found formerly incarcerated people owe as much as 60% of their income to criminal debts. The elimination of excessive and punitive criminal fees will relieve the immense strain placed on individuals and their families, and will allow them to continue building new, healthy lives."

-- Esteban Nuñez, Policy Coordinator at the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC)

“SB 144 will create safer, healthier communities and a more equitable justice system. The Legislature should act now to ensure that all California families have a fair chance at economic wellbeing.”

-- Lizzie Buchen, ACLU California

“Criminal justice fees are foisted upon people who are the least able to pay them, and can extend a person's punishment beyond what is conscionable. Recent efforts in Alameda County to eliminate the fees revealed that they are effectively a regressive tax on low-income communities of color. SB 144 gives California a chance to stand against the criminalization of poverty and restore financial justice to marginalized communities across the state.”

-- Brandon Greene, East Bay Community Law Center

“The impact of oppressive fees is both racist and sexist. Due to racial disparities in policing and sentencing, Black and Latinx families are often burdened with heavier debt than white families. Further, national research shows that the cost of fees and other costs related to incarceration, even the incarceration of men, is paid by women in the overwhelming majority of cases.”

-- Emily Harris, Program Manager, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

“Homeboy Industries is honored to co-sponsor SB 144, a critical bill that will repeal criminal legal fees. For too long, our community of formerly incarcerated and gang involved individuals has been burdened by fees that create significant obstacles to stability and security. Eliminating these fees will serve as a big step toward truly allowing thousands of Californians the opportunity to build a life of dignity and independence.”

-- Donna Harati, Homeboy Industries

“Criminal administrative fees are yet another government-sponsored mechanism that creates barriers to building wealth and economic security for communities of color and women. These fees strip dignity, limit choice and prevent people from reaching their full potential. SB 144 takes an important step toward racial and economic justice in California, and will serve as a beacon for the rest of the nation to follow suit.”

-- Jhumpa Bhattacharya, Insight Center for Community Economic Development

“Criminal fees strip critical financial resources from low-income communities and communities of color, drive poor families deeper into poverty, and undermine successful reentry. The passage of SB 144 would represent a major milestone in the movement for criminal justice reform and equity in California and serve as a model for the nation.”

-- Lewis Brown, PolicyLink

“The fees eliminated in this legislation are high-pain, low gain. San Francisco became the first county to eliminate these fees, recognizing they are charged to low-income communities that can't afford to pay, create barriers to reentry, and are not a good source of revenue for our city. I'm proud to support this legislation to remove these barriers statewide, and to find more just and sustainable sources of revenue that aren't borne on the backs of low-income people and communities of color.”

-- José Cisneros, San Francisco Treasurer

"We applaud this move. These fees can add up to thousands of dollars of debt for people who have served their time, and create obstacles to successfully moving on to productive lives. California does not have to fund its budget on the backs of our most vulnerable residents, many of whom are already facing homelessness and unemployment."

-- Manohar Raju, San Francisco Public Defender

"Across the country, local governments, constrained by shrinking budgets, have passed the costs of running the criminal justice system onto incarcerated people and their families by charging fines, fees, and costs. But more and more jurisdictions have begun to realize that these administrative fees are just a regressive tax on some of our most vulnerable communities. SB 144 is a step in the right direction toward racial equity and the decriminalization of poverty."

-- Stephanie Campos-Bui, UC Berkeley School of Law Policy Clinic

"Eliminating administrative fees will allow formerly incarcerated people to devote their already limited resources to critical needs like food, education, housing and health insurance. Repealing criminal fees will result in improved employment prospects for formerly incarcerated people and put more money in the pockets of economically insecure families, aiding successful reentry and reducing California's recidivism rate."

-- Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law and Poverty

"Criminal administrative fees are an undue tax on our society's most impoverished and criminalized communities. Due to racial and class bias at every stage of the criminal justice system, from policing to sentencing, communities of color are the ones most burdened with criminal justice debt leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and criminalization. SB 144 will ensure that hundreds of millions of dollars a year will stay in the communities that need it the most for food, housing, education, and transportation, rather than being siphoned off into the criminal justice system."

-- Anthony Robles, Youth Justice Coalition

"Across California, families like mine are being evicted from our homes, struggling to buy food and have no access to medical care. But the system is still coming after us for thousands of dollars in fees and fines. We already pay taxes for the court and Probation systems. So our families are getting taxed twice. The system is built off our poverty."

-- Lupita Carballo, Youth Justice Coalition, Los Angeles

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