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# ALAMEDA COUNTY HALTS JUVENILE PROBATION FEES

Thousands of low-income Alameda County families will no longer have to pay juvenile probation and public defender fees. On March 29, 2016 the Alameda County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to impose an immediate moratorium on all fees charged to parents and guardians with children in the juvenile justice system. The moratorium freezes all fee assessment and collection, offering immediate relief to more than 2,900 families with outstanding debt and shielding thousands of families who pass through Alameda's juvenile courts every year from future financial hardship.

The moratorium is the result of efforts lead by the U.C. Berkeley School of Law Policy Advocacy Clinic and the East Bay Community Law Center, in collaboration with key county departments (including the Probation Department, the Central Collections Agency and the Public Defender's Office) and on behalf of several community partners, including the East Bay Children's Law Office, the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California and the Prison Law Office.

Prior to the moratorium, Alameda County charged a range of fees to families with children in the juvenile system, including $25.29 for each night in Juvenile Hall, $15.00 per day for electronic ankle monitoring, $90 a month for probation supervision, a $250 probation investigation fee, and a $300 public defender fee, among others. In some cases, the fees added up to thousands of dollars per family.

These fees put financial stress on low-income families and strained fragile relationships. Because youth of color are disproportionately impacted by the juvenile system and serve longer average probation terms than their white counterparts, these fees hurt families of color the most. In their letter to the Board of Supervisors proposing the moratorium, Supervisors Richard Valle and Keith Carson highlighted how families struggle to pay these fees: "Imposing this kind of debt on families induces economic and familial instability, which undermines the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile justice system."

According to a report by the Policy Advocacy Clinic, the County saw little financial gain from these fees. Last year, the County netted approximately $168,000, which amounts to a tiny portion of its $2.74 billion budget.

"The moratorium is a huge win for young people and their families," says Attorney Kate Weisburd who directs the Youth Defender Clinic at the East Bay Community Law Center and represents young people in juvenile court. "This punitive debt has no place in the juvenile system—it undermines family stability at a time when stability is needed most," Weisburd explains. "The families we work with are some of the poorest in the County and yet they were asked to foot the bill for the juvenile justice system."

The moratorium is the first of its kind in California, where all but a handful of counties charge juvenile fees. According to Brendon Woods, the Public Defender for Alameda County, "The Board of Supervisors deserves tremendous credit for recognizing that an existing county policy was harming families, and taking swift action to correct the problem."

The East Bay Community Law Center and the Policy Advocacy Clinic are now working with the Youth Justice Coalition, the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights and the Western Center on Law and Poverty on legislation authored by State Senator Holly Mitchell – SB 941 – that would repeal juvenile fees statewide. According to Senator Mitchell: "I commend Alameda County for acknowledging the toll that these fees have on poor families in the community and for taking action. With the passage of SB 941, we will expand this relief for all families across California."

The Board's moratorium goes into effect immediately with instructions to the Auditor-Controller's Office and the Probation Department to prepare for a full repeal in June 2016.

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