

PRESS RELEASE

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News Media Contacts:

Emily Miller
Clinical Law Student
[Policy Advocacy Clinic](#)
UC Berkeley School of Law
646-369-7526
emiller@clinical.law.berkeley.edu

Kim McGill
Organizer
[Youth Justice Coalition Los Angeles](#)
323-235-4243
kim@youth4justice.org

Jessica Bartholow
Policy Advocate
[Western Center on Law & Poverty](#)
916-282-5119
jbartholow@wclp.org

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DISCHARGES NEARLY \$90 MILLION IN JUVENILE DETENTION FEES

Advocacy groups call on all California counties to follow suit and bring about “Debt-Free Justice” for youth and families

Los Angeles, CA —Today, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to discharge nearly \$90 million in fees previously imposed on tens of thousands of families with children in the juvenile justice system, marking the single largest discharge of juvenile justice fees in history.

The county [action](#) comes in the wake of [Senate Bill 190](#), a major, bipartisan juvenile justice reform bill signed by Governor Jerry Brown in October 2017 that ended the harmful, unlawful and costly practice of charging administrative fees to families for their children’s public defender, detention, supervision, electronic monitoring, and drug testing.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor’s motion noted that: “There is compelling evidence that the administrative fees related to detention undermine youth rehabilitation and public safety, increase the financial insecurity of vulnerable families, and are correlated to higher recidivism rates.”

“I’m delighted Los Angeles County took this important step for equity and justice,” said Senator Holly J. Mitchell (D-Los Angeles), author of SB 190. “We fought hard for SB 190 to give youth and their families in the juvenile justice system a fresh start, and this action by the Board of Supervisors will relieve tens of thousands of families of harmful and counterproductive fees.”

Joint author Senator Ricardo Lara (D-Bell Gardens), also praised the decision: “By forgiving these old fees, Los Angeles is relieving families of this burden and furthering the interest of economic justice for young people.”

Although SB 190 ended new fee assessments effective January 1, 2018, it did not require counties to

forgive fees charged in previous years. While Los Angeles had already suspended the assessment of juvenile detention fees back in 2009, millions of dollars in outstanding fee obligations and court judgments remained on their books. Today's action by the Board of Supervisors will formally discharge more than 52,000 accounts.

SB 190 and fee reform campaigns across the state were inspired by the leadership of the Youth Justice Coalition of Los Angeles (YJC), whose members first brought this issue to light in 2009 with a pathbreaking report, [Getting Paid](#). YJC member Lupita Carballo noted the harm of juvenile fees: "My older brother has been in and out of the system since he was ten years old. My mother is a single mom and paid thousands of dollars in fees. I could tell how it worried her. She would leave the house for work at 4am and come home at 6 or 7 at night. She would just look so sad and tired. I'm glad this will help other families."

According to YJC Organizer Kim McGill, "the Board's decision is the result of nearly 10 years of work by our members demanding an end to fees and fines for youth impacted by the juvenile system. L.A. County and California still have a long way to go, but today was a major step forward for young people and their families."

A 2017 study by the UC Berkeley Policy Advocacy Clinic, [Making Families Pay](#), found that juvenile fees generate little revenue after collection costs, since most families with children in the system cannot afford to pay them. And because children from families of color are arrested and punished disproportionately, such families bear a much heavier burden than others.

Stephanie Campos-Bui, one of the authors of the UC Berkeley study, noted that "more than half of all counties have now ended collection of juvenile fees in California, and the rest should follow suit and discharge outstanding fees. California can serve as a model for all states with a debt-free juvenile justice system."

Twenty-six counties in California are still trying to collect almost \$144 million in previously charged fees, \$116 million of which is being pursued by just three Southern California counties: San Diego (\$63 million), Orange (\$38 million), and Riverside (\$15 million).

According to Jess Bartholow at the Western Center for Law & Poverty, "In passing SB 190, California became a national leader in ending regressive and racially discriminatory juvenile fees. Counties should finish the job by relieving families of any old fees that remain on the books, many of which were assessed improperly and none of which contribute to youth rehabilitation or to public safety."

The Board's action requires County officials to take all necessary legal action to discharge and release all outstanding fees, including court orders and liens. Further, county officials must notify parents, guardians, and other related parties of the fee relief and must report back quarterly to the Board until the process of fee discharge is complete.

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[The Policy Advocacy Clinic](#) at UC Berkeley School of Law trains law and public policy students to pursue non-litigation strategies to address systemic racial, economic, and social injustice.

[The Western Center on Law & Poverty](#) fights for justice and system-wide change to secure housing, health care, racial justice and a strong safety net for low-income Californians.

[The Youth Justice Coalition](#) works to build a youth-led movement to challenge race, gender and class inequality in the Los Angeles County juvenile injustice system.