

Recommendations for the House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice
January 2023
Kansas Advisory Group (KAG) on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Letter from the KAG Executive Committee

Dear House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Chair,

The Executive Committee of the Kansas Advisory Group (KAG) on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention wish to thank you and your Committee for your commitment in supporting the vision of Kansas’s youth justice system by “strengthening families” and “empowering youth.” We are writing in support of HB 2073, “To lead the nation in juvenile justice,” by eliminating fines and fees for justice-involved young people.

Columbia Law School and the Juvenile Law Center (2021) have revealed that Kansas imposes more fees than almost *any other state in the country*.¹ The National Juvenile Defender Center (2020) found Kansas levies these fines and fees at “virtually every interaction with, and service ordered by, the juvenile court” (p. 61).² Young people entering the juvenile justice system in Kansas quickly accumulate punitive fines and fees that are prohibitively expensive, and create long-term barriers including exiting the system, seeking employment, and securing housing.

Youth-of-color in Kansas are more likely to be arrested, detained, or charged with a crime compared to their white counterparts. They are also more likely to be charged greater fines and fees than their white counterparts, creating socioeconomic inequity. These fines and fees trap young people and their families in a debt loop that makes it difficult to rebuild their lives. In essence, this process criminalizes poverty. Cases remain open longer only for payment, and defenders report Kansas youth miss school for payment-related court dates.³ These fines and fees do nothing to prevent crime, but are successful at hurting our youth, families, and communities.

Members of the KAG serve in roles that place them in direct contact with the families who are negatively affected by these fines and fees, and have personally witnessed the devastation these costs can bring to already vulnerable Kansans. Families are forced into difficult decisions

¹ Anderson, N., Kreider, R., & Schnell, K. (2021). *Injustice in the lowest courts: How municipal courts rob America’s youth*. Retrieved from <https://debtorsprison.jlc.org/documents/JLC-Debtors-Injustice-in-Lowest-Courts.pdf>

² National Juvenile Defender Center. (2020, October). *Limited justice: An assessment of access to and quality of juvenile defense counsel in Kansas*. Retrieved from <https://njdc.info/wp-content/uploads/Kansas-Assessment-Web.pdf>

³ Juvenile Law Center. *Eliminating debtor’s prison for kids*. Retrieved from https://www.debtfreejusticeks.org/_files/ugd/6df94c_58bd64e650544d9593b0d129bf7f53fd.pdf

of either paying their youth's debts or providing basic necessities (e.g., clothing).⁴ The adoption of HB 2073 would eliminate these unnecessary barriers, and would be aligned with Kansas's vision for justice-involved youth and their families.

Kansas juvenile justice reform serves as a model for other states; however, to-date, Kansas has failed to recognize that fines and fees for youth can create life-long consequences that are severe and harmful for youth and their families. The KAG Executive Committee wish to thank you for your consideration of our recommendation to eliminate fines and fees for justice-involved young people. Please feel free to contact the KAG's Chairperson, Terri Williams at twilliams@csimail.org or at 785-249-6462.

⁴ National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges. (2018). *Resolution addressing fines, fees, and court costs in juvenile courts*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/resolution-addressing-fines-fees-and-costs-in-juvenile-courts.pdf>