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*REPORT SHOWS SUPPORT FOR ELIMINATING FINES AND FEES AND IMPROVING COMMUNITY SUPERVISION
WITHIN YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM*

A [new report](#) shows that fines and fees within the youth justice system do not offset the cost of youth incarceration for taxpayers, nor do they improve public safety. Furthermore, it concludes the use of community supervision is a better alternative to the use of secure confinement.

According to Genevieve Caffrey, member of the La Follette School capstone team: “Interviews with youth justice stakeholders in five counties indicate that fines and fees carry more than a monetary impact. They can send a child and family into a cycle of negative consequences which prevent youth from getting the support that is actually needed to mitigate long-term harm.”

Takeaways from this report point to the need to streamline, reduce, and, preferably, eliminate juvenile fines and fees and ensure that community supervision offers equitable access to quality programs and partnerships for all youth in all communities. The qualitative, quantitative and research findings indicate that:

- Fines and fees cause short- and long-term harm for system-involved youth and their families due to pre-existing socio-economic disparities.
- Fines and fees are not a significant source of revenue for many local budgets (see Figure 1 as an example of the low amount of revenue collected).
- Many states and localities—nationally and in Wisconsin—have found that using youth justice fines and fees has high enforcement costs with little financial gain, and they have subsequently eliminated the practice.
- Community supervision is most effective and successful when there is access to programming that addresses the social-emotional needs of the youth and their families.



- Many states and localities have developed successful community supervision programs through community partnerships with stakeholders, which enhances access to such resources. Dane, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Outagamie, Racine, Red Cliff Nation, and Waukesha are just a few of the jurisdictions that are working on this.

Erica Nelson, Advocacy Director at Kids Forward, said her organization’s collaborative work with graduate students at the La Follette School was prompted in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a sharp decline in the use of secure detention for juvenile offenders and increased community supervision. “The changes during the pandemic have prompted Wisconsin stakeholders to rethink the use of secure custody for youth and the related fines and fees, which can be very difficult for many families to pay. We wanted to use this opportunity to look more closely at fines and fees and community supervision using a racial equity lens.”

The report found that in many instances community supervision outperforms secure confinement in three key areas: cost-effectiveness, deterring recidivism, and increased individual and family engagement in services.

Nelson said, “the report’s findings underscore that it is time to eliminate fines and fees and focus on funding community supervision programs that are more cost effective in providing accountability, increasing access to services for youth and improving public safety.”

Data about diversion to community supervision also reveal persistent racial disparities. White youth are far more likely to be offered community supervision in lieu of secure confinement. In contrast, research shows that Black youth are five times more likely than White youth to be detained for the same behavior.

Nelson goes on to say: “Eliminating fines and fees and diverting youth away from confinement through community supervision is important, but it has to be done equitably. The racial disparities within the youth justice system have increased as a result of the pandemic – we have to investigate the reasons why this is and take immediate action to change it.”

This [report](#) is a collaboration between Kids Forward and the Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.