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Department of Justice Takes Action on Costs, Fines and Fees for Juvenile Offenders

Washington, D.C. (January 12, 2017) - Today the Department of Justice issued [critical guidance](#) on the use of costs, fines and fees for youth in the juvenile justice system. This development follows a campaign of advocacy and research on the widespread abuse of costs, fines and fees in the juvenile justice system, and Juvenile Law Center's publication of a [groundbreaking national report](#) on the issue.

Following the publication of our report, Juvenile Law Center met with the Department of Justice and the White House to share our findings. We also presented at a Capitol Hill briefing. President Barack Obama issued a [Presidential Proclamation](#) on costs, fines and fees, and promised further guidance before the end of his term. Today, his administration made good on that promise, providing advice and authority for states who want to address this issue.

"This is crucial action by the Justice Department to provide guidance for jurisdictions on costs, fines and fees in the juvenile justice system," said Sue Mangold, Executive Director of Juvenile Law Center. "The looming question is what will President-elect Donald Trump's incoming Attorney General do to implement this guidance? We don't know, but now advocates like Juvenile Law Center have this tool to push local reform."

Approximately one million youth appear in juvenile courts each year. In every state, youth and families can be required to pay juvenile court costs, fees, fines, or restitution. The costs for court related services, including probation, a "free appointed attorney," mental health evaluations, the costs of incarceration, treatment, or restitution payments, can push poor children deeper into the system and families deeper into debt. Youth who can't afford to pay for their freedom often face serious consequences, including incarceration, extended probation, or denial of treatment—they are unfairly penalized for being poor.

Through the generous support of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, *Debtors' Prison for Kids? The High Cost of Fines and Fees in the Juvenile Justice System*, and its associated study investigating the impact of costs on recidivism, provide a much-needed road map for policymakers nationwide who care about fairness in our justice system. We applaud the Department of Justice for taking action as promised, and intend to protect this important win moving forward.

Juvenile Law Center is the oldest non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the nation. Widely published and internationally recognized as thought leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center's impact on the development of law and policy on behalf of children is substantial. Juvenile Law Center uses an array of legal strategies and policy advocacy to promote fairness, prevent harm, ensure access to appropriate services, and create opportunities for success for youth in the foster care and justice systems. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit www.JLC.org.

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