

CONTACT:

KATY OTTO (JUVENILE LAW CENTER)

OFFICE: 215-625-0551 x 128 EMAIL: kotto@jlc.org

Congressman Cárdenas Introduces *Ending Debtor's Prison for Kids Act*, Seeking to End Unjust Juvenile Fines and Fees

Juvenile Law Center applauds the bill as a critical step forward in the fight to abolish the practice

Washington, DC (April 12, 2019): Congressman Tony Cárdenas (D-CA) today introduced the *Ending Debtor's Prison for Kids Act*, a bill which would provide incentives for states to eliminate the practice of imposing and collecting juvenile fines and fees. Juvenile Law Center, author of the groundbreaking [Debtors' Prison for Kids report](#), which brought national attention to the issue of harmful fines and fees for youth in the justice system, applauded the move.

"Across the country, youth are pushed deeper into the justice system and families are pushed into poverty just because they can't afford justice system fines and fees. By incentivizing states to end these harmful practices, the legislation will create better and more equitable outcomes for youth, families, and communities," said Jessica Feerman, Juvenile Law Center's Senior Managing Director and co-author of the report. "We are grateful to Congressman Cárdenas for his commitment to children and his leadership on this issue."

The *Ending Debtor's Prison for Kids Act* earmarks funds for rehabilitation services for youth in the justice system to be available to states that eliminate the practice. Since the release of Juvenile Law Center's Debtors' Prison for Kids report, there has been increasing momentum for reform. Juvenile Law Center, Berkeley Law Policy Advocacy Clinic and a wide coalition partners of national and local partners have succeeded in enacting policy changes in several jurisdictions, including California, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Ohio.

"We need to eliminate the cruel practice of collecting fines and fees that keep children in jail and American families in debt," Congressman Tony Cárdenas said. "Today, in America, 12-year-old children can be incarcerated for being poor, and that is just not acceptable. These children belong in school, not in detention centers. Today, during Second Chance Month, I will begin my fight to end this cruel practice and make certain all children have a second chance at a better life. I am proud to stand with Juvenile Law Center and the juvenile justice community to put an end to this cruel practice. These children deserve champions, and today is a perfect day to become one. I call on my colleagues in both parties to join me and fight this problem together."

The movement for #debtfreejustice is growing nationwide as more communities begin to understand the harm of imposing monetary sanctions on children. Juvenile Law Center urges Congress to pass this important bill, and urges state and local lawmakers to introduce their own legislation to ban the unjust practice completely.

More details on co-sponsors and supporters of the bill follow:

Endorsing Groups: Juvenile Law Center, Campaign for Youth Justice, Fines and Fees Justice Center, Western Center on Law and Poverty, National Association of Social Workers, National Network for Youth, Coalition For Juvenile Justice (CJJ), American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), The National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors, The National Association for Rural Mental Health, National Crittenton, Justice For Families, School Social Work Association of America, National Council on Independent Living, Learning Disabilities Association of America, Anti-Recidivism Coalition, Public Good Law Center, Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety (CARS), Homeboy Industries, Housing and Economic Rights Advocates (HERA), Insight Center for Community Economic Empowerment, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, R Street Institute, Time for Change Foundation, Rubicon Programs, Growing Greatness, Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, Dolores Huerta Foundation, Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, National Consumer Law Center, Children's Defense Fund CA, and UC Berkeley Policy Advocacy Clinic

Current Co-Sponsors: Reps. Eleanor Holmes Norton, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Grace Napolitano, Danny Davis (Danny), Donald Payne Jr., Barbara Lee, David Trone, Rashida Tlaib

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems.

Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit www.JLC.org.

#