

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Eliminate Certain Juvenile Justice Fines, Fees, and Costs

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TRENTON – Governor Murphy today signed legislation (S-3319/A-5507) that eliminates certain juvenile justice fines, fees, costs, and other monetary penalties. The legislation acts to improve the juvenile justice system by eliminating unnecessary costs.

“Eliminating these fees will contribute towards breaking the cycle of poverty that often stems from historically biased institutions,” **said Governor Murphy**. “The imposition of fines and fees on justice-involved youth often falls disproportionately on minority and low-income families. I am proud to sign legislation that will further the rehabilitation goals of the juvenile justice system and make New Jersey stronger and fairer for everyone.”

Primary sponsors of the legislation include Senators Nellie Pou, Nia H. Gill, and Assemblymembers Raj Mukherji, Adam J. Taliaferro, and Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.

“Many of these juveniles are from low-income households, and these fees and monetary penalties put a financial strain on families at precisely the time they are in need of relief,” **said Senator Pou**. “Further, research has shown these extra fees can have long-term negative consequences, including higher dropout chances, and the increased likelihood of recidivism. We need to be lifting these young people up, not putting them back into a financial hole the minute they go free.”

“The administrative fees imposed on juveniles can be crippling to families, especially for low-income families with limited resources,” **said Senator Gill**. “This bill will eliminate the additional fines which are not in the discretion of the court to dismiss and will alleviate this unnecessary burden on families who often are left to shoulder the cost.”

“This new law will help curb the contribution of New Jersey’s juvenile justice system to the cycle of poverty. How do we justify young people being further penalized with fines and fees intended to support the juvenile justice system when many aren’t even old enough to get a job?” **asked Assemblyman Mukherji, Chair of the Judiciary Committee**. “Their burdens are often taken on by families who are already struggling to make ends meet, which is a miscarriage of justice with no public safety purpose.”

“The costs associated with our juvenile justice system are far too great for many children and their families to pay,” **said Assemblyman Taliaferro**. “Our youth often have to choose between paying off these debts and paying for necessities, which can make staying out of trouble harder due to these excessive financial burdens.”

“Not only do these costs take an emotional toll on the young people already caught up in a complicated situation, but it disproportionately affects minority and low-income families in our state,” **said Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson**. “It is time to end these unnecessary costs and penalties.”

The bill also prohibits a warrant from being issued for a juvenile defendant or the parents or guardian of a juvenile defendant for failure to pay certain statutorily imposed assessments, probation fees, other court imposed financial obligations, restitution, or child support.

“The collection of outstanding fines and fees from youth justice system-involved youth has been an unjust penalty for them when they need support, not punishment that compounds with interest. It is particularly oppressive for youth of color who are already disproportionately tied up in the youth justice system,” **said Yannick Wood, Director of the Criminal Justice Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice**. “We commend the Legislature for passing, and Governor Murphy for signing, this legislation which will finally abolish certain outstanding monetary penalties providing a clean financial slate for New Jersey’s most vulnerable youth.”

“As a young person who knows the impact of the youth justice system and fines and fees, I am grateful for this law which will help young people move on with their lives at an important time for them,” **said Kevin Reeves**. “I hope there will be more legislation and programs to help New Jersey’s youth who need support to stay out of the system in the first place.”

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