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Washington State Ends Practice of Charging Families For Their Child's Incarceration

Ending "parent pay" – a 2022 Legislative Session priority for Stand for Children – allows Washington to uphold racial equity and help youth successfully transition into adulthood while eliminating a wasteful government policy

"Parent pay" eliminated following overwhelming bipartisan support in State House and Senate, Governor's signature

OLYMPIA – Today, the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF), Stand for Children, and the Center for Children and Youth Justice applaud Governor Inslee and the Washington State Legislature for adopting HB 2050 and ending "parent pay" in Washington State. Parent pay, which requires families to pay a percentage of their income to support their child's incarceration, was a barrier to young peoples' successful transition out of the juvenile system and toward a second chance. The policy had inequitable racial outcomes, created debt for families already struggling financially, and was an inefficient source of revenue for the state.

The coalition of voices that advocated for the elimination of parent pay in Washington applaud the legislation's prime sponsors Representative Kirsten Harris-Talley and Senator Claire Wilson, as well as Governor Inslee, and the Department of Children Youth and Families. As a result of their leadership, HB 2050 earned broad bipartisan support in the House (85-13) and the Senate (41-6). A direct outcome of HB 2050 will be the ending of an ineffective, expensive, and harmful practice in Washington.

"DCYF has been working to eliminate practices that are harmful to children and their families, and particularly those practices that are financially stupid," said Ross Hunter, DCYF Secretary. "Requiring parents to pay for the incarceration of their children is a prime example – it probably costs more to collect than we bring in and makes it less likely for youth to reunify with their families, destabilizing their transition back to the community. We're excited the Legislature repealed it!"

"Just as we support improvements in our education system that help students successfully transition into adulthood, Stand for Children was pleased to support this law, which will enable young people in our state to better transition toward the fresh start they deserve after

navigating the juvenile court system,” said Kia Franklin, executive director of Stand for Children Washington. “This law meaningfully mitigates the devastating financial destabilization and debt that follows young people and their families at a time when they should be able to focus on moving forward.”

“The elimination of ‘Parent Pay’ moves us toward our vision of a more equitable, just, and truly rehabilitative system,” said Rachel Sottile, President & CEO of the Center for Children & Youth Justice. “It is one step in our collective effort to reform the youth criminal legal system; we must remain steadfast in eliminating all fines and fees. They are harmful, counterproductive, and racist. Fines and fees threaten the economic stability of families and entrench youth in a cycle of incarceration.”

Fines and fees in the juvenile system create significant obstacles for families who often become forced to choose between affording basic needs and paying the court. This is especially true for families of color and low-income households, who are disproportionately impacted at every decision point in the juvenile system. By eliminating economic sanctions like parent pay, Washington State is taking steps toward a more just judicial system—one without unnecessary, punitive, and long-term debt for families in crisis.

More than 22 states have taken steps to eliminate all or some juvenile costs, including fees like parent pay. Today, Washington continues to be a key driver in the movement to eliminate all juvenile fees nationwide.

Stand for Children Washington

As a nonprofit advocacy organization active in Washington since 2007, Stand for Children is a unique catalyst for education equity and racial justice, to create a brighter future for us all.

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