

Hello my name is Desmond E. Bryant-White. I am the Manager of Progeny a program of Destination Innovation. Progeny is a youth/adult partnership focused on reimagining the juvenile justice system and reinvestment into community-based alternatives. We believe every child in the juvenile justice system deserves justice and respect. That in order to make a safe and thriving community we must address the root causes of harm and work collectively to make real change.

Fines in fees affected my life after I had already turned 18. However, a lot of those fees that happened over 15 years ago are still lingering over my life. I am still trying to pay off and get my life back together. It's unfortunate because most of those circumstances derived from being profiled while driving. Rather it be a dim tag light or failing to signal 100 ft from the intersection. Usually something small and nonviolent that can destroy a young person's life if they are unable to pay the fines and fees behind a curious traffic stop.

So, I can only imagine the stress and anguish that fines and fees can put onto a family that does not have the money to pay those fees. As an adult who has been there and back, I think it is safe to say that the system as it is not giving youth a fair chance at a successful future. When we think about the amount of resource, we spend to collect fines and fees vs the number of resources that are used to restore and empower, it should be embarrassing.

When young people and their families are unable to afford court fees and other costs, their cases are kept open longer solely for missed payments or missed school or work for payment-related court dates. Young people can face heavy loads of debt, civil judgments, and ruined credit, limiting their opportunities for years to come. Children don't pay bills or get jobs – by requiring juveniles to pay fines and fees at every step of the court process, we place the burden of harsh punishment on working families, many of whom already live paycheck to paycheck, trapping them into a cycle of debt.

Kansas courts charge children in the legal system and their families thousands of dollars in unjust fines and fees at every step of the court process. These financial penalties undermine public safety and family stability, punish poverty, deepen existing racial and economic disparities, and set up young people to fail for years to come. Kansas legislators have the power and the responsibility to effectively and immediately correct the juvenile fines and fees system by passing the Debt Free Justice for Youth Act.

I ask that we don't forget about the youth who don't have a voice, that we don't forget about the youth that are underrepresented, that we don't forget about the youth that have been marginalized because they have made a mistake and don't have the resources to pay for it. A kid who makes a mistake should be able to learn & do better. Instead, we charge them fines & fees they can't pay, which stresses families during the very times kids need the most support—and they're more likely to reoffend.

With Progeny our goal is to constantly reimagine what juvenile justice looks like. As leaders we actually have the power to do just that. We can set them up for success. Not a cycle of debt and please do what you can do to help pass HB 2073 to eliminate youth fines & fees this year. We are an outlier on this issue. We can follow the path of states like Louisiana which passed this bill unanimously. This bill is something that I hope all people could get behind. Young Kansans are our future. We must constantly ask ourselves what are we doing to invest in our youth today. For what we do today shapes a greater tomorrow for us all.