



January 26, 2023

Karuva Kaseke, Fiscal Policy Analyst
Kansas Action for Children
Written-only proponent testimony on HB 2073
House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Chairman Owens and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2073, which would eliminate fines and fees assessed on youth in the juvenile justice system. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

The Kansas juvenile justice system exists to “promote public safety, hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior and improve their ability to live more productively and responsibly in the community.”¹ **Fees and fines imposed on youth, from their first interaction with law enforcement to the final outcome of their case, are ineffective and counterproductive to these goals and do not reflect Kansas values.**

For any youth, introduction into the criminal justice system can have life-changing implications that can make them ineligible for some future financial assistance and educational and employment opportunities. However, for low-income youth, the harm is deeper and more widespread. **As most youth do not have an income, that court debt is passed on to their family. This puts the family at risk of being further driven into poverty and forced to compromise on essentials like food, rent, health care, and child care.**

The disruption and long-lasting stress these financial burdens cause is not a solution and becomes a punishment in and of itself – a punishment based solely on the ability to pay. That family wealth is a deliberate factor to the outcome of young people’s futures is not only unfair, but wholly unjust. Fines and fees are inequitable, do not address what led youth into the justice system, and create hardship for their closest support systems during an already difficult time.

¹ K.S.A. § 8-2301



As a society, we have an obligation to collectively consider and implement laws, policies, and practices that will help children take accountability for their mistakes, as well as learn and grow. Several states acknowledge that justice-involved youth face distinct challenges and that financial burdens in the form of fines and fees are harmful while providing no substantial revenue-generating benefit to the state.

We believe HB 2073 will help make the juvenile justice system more fair as it helps youth make positive and productive changes to their lives and create stronger and safer families and communities. Accountability and rehabilitation are better achieved through evidence-based practices and programs that offer the stability and structure the youth need.

Under the Kansas Juvenile Justice Code, courts have alternative, more equitable options to hold youth accountable without creating recurrent financial hardship. Shown to reduce recidivism and provide greater opportunity for redirecting youth to become productive and responsible adults, these include:

- Community service
- Education programs
- Intervention programs
- Mediations
- Community-based programs

Combined with the emphasis on proven alternatives, HB 2073 is a step toward a justice system that can positively and intentionally improve the ability of youth to live more productively and responsibly in their communities now and as they grow up.

At Kansas Action for Children, we believe that every child should have the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive, yet we know that not all Kansans have the same opportunities to succeed. As a state, we must bring our collective focus on finding ways to strengthen families and communities to meet the needs of youth regardless of race, income, zip code, identity, or ability.

We thank you for this hearing and encourage you to especially ponder the testimonies of those who have been impacted by the barriers this bill seeks to remove. With strong support in favor of HB 2073, we urge you to favorably pass this bill out of your committee.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at karuva@kac.org.