

## ANOTHER CHANCE:

### YOUTH PERSPECTIVE AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CREATE POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO IMPOSING COSTS, FINES, AND FEES.

#### INTRODUCTION:

We are Juveniles for Justice -- youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system and are working to improve it. We have experienced a lot by just being in the system, and many of us and our families have had to pay court costs, fees, and fines, which can amount to thousands of dollars. Neither we nor our families have the finances to pay for these fees. But failure to pay means we can get sent back to placement, are not released from placement at all, or stay on probation until the debt is paid. Paying costs, fees, and fines can also lead to debt or can force us or our families to choose between paying the court or meeting our basic needs for food and shelter. We believe that courts should consider alternatives to imposing costs, fees, and fines that better serve the goals of the juvenile justice system. **"Give me a path that is not placement."**

During my probation, I damaged my ankle bracelet [ by accident, when I was taking a shower] and I had to pay 300 dollars for it before I could get off probation. I was able to pay for almost half of it and then I had to complete community service to work off the rest. -Jaheem

#### WHAT DO YOUTH NEED?

Rehabilitation is still a primary goal of the juvenile justice system. Research shows that non-rehabilitative punitive sanctions have negative effects on juveniles' development and may actually promote recidivism<sup>1</sup>. In our experiences, we would have benefited from: after school programs in our communities, peer leadership programs, therapeutic services, community service, and mentorship programs.

Young people need programs that provide emotional support, help them get an education, and teach them about justice and equality. If I had a choice, I would have liked to do some sort of writing or reading program for community service or as a diversion program. -Anahi

#### HOW CAN ALTERNATIVES BE REHABILITATIVE?

Costs, fees, and fines are not rehabilitative, and when we can't pay them, incarcerating us isn't rehabilitative, either. Youth should not be torn away from the safety and support of their communities when they are unable to pay fees. We believe we should stay in our communities. If we stay in our communities we can stay in comfortable surroundings while being a productive citizen. Restorative justice programs divert youth away from the juvenile justice system and work to engage the youth, the victim, and the community. These programs help improve our own community and prevent us from being institutionalized and reoffending.

I participated in a community service program where I helped with senior citizen bingo. The community service was in my community, and I liked being close to my house.... If I had the choice, I would have liked to do life skills classes, community service or a diversion program. -Ange

#### HOW CAN ALTERNATIVES ENCOURAGE ACCOUNTABILITY?

Restorative justice practices reduce recidivism and help us understand the impact of our actions on the community. Diversion programs and community service can help us better understand the consequences of their actions and learn more about our own neighborhood. Getting us actively engaged in our community gives us the opportunity to not only show that we can stop doing harm but do good, as well. We believe that participating in other community based programs that we are interested in will keep us out of trouble and reduce the

likelihood of us getting in trouble again. We also believe that when we do go to placement for not paying our fees, we aren't less likely to get in trouble again. Restorative justice programs, diversion programs, and community service and community based programs allow us to network and meet new people that provide us essential support to stay out of trouble.

We, as a society should not want people to have to pay costs, fines, and fees, if it would impact them keeping their home and having food to eat. As youth, we do not have money to afford these costs. - Alex

## RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVES TO IMPOSING COSTS, FINES, AND FEES AND TO PLACING YOUTH FOR NON-PAYMENT

- ❖ Youth should not be charged costs, fines, and fees for a crime they committed. Youth do not learn from paying a fine with money they do not have.
- ❖ Youth and families who have already incurred costs from the juvenile justice system should be given the opportunities to finish paying off the debt through community service.
- ❖ To prevent youth from incurring costs, fines, and fees and placing youth for non-payment, Philadelphia should begin implementing more restorative justice programs, diversion programs, and community service options.
- ❖ Youth should be diverted to programs that fit their offense or their interests. Youth do not learn from being stuck in programs that have no interest to them.
- ❖ Diversion programs should include mentorship, information about the juvenile justice system, peer leadership, and opportunities for youth to explore their interests.

I think there should be more programs to help kids not pay costs and fees. I have participated in community service and afterschool programs including Juveniles for Justice. I would recommend this type of alternative for other youth because it teaches them more about the juvenile justice system. -Zakair

While trying to pay bills and take care of my son I have had to put things on hold to pay for my court fees, or I could face being penalized. I believe that community service and other alternatives should be given as an alternative because a young person cannot afford to pay the fines and fees. -Sasha

- ❖ Judges, attorneys, probation officers, and social workers should work with a youth to identify the best community service option that helps the community, allows the youth to learn, and accommodates the youth's everyday schedule to ensure that they complete the community service.

I entered the justice system at 16 and was sent to an adult facility for 3 months. I was then connected with the Youth Sentencing and Re-entry Project (YSRP) who helped get my case sent to juvenile court. When I returned home YSRP connected me to other programs including Juveniles for Justice. As a result, I stayed out of trouble and met new people doing great things. I would recommend programs like this for other youth. – Eugene

**Additionally, Juveniles for Justice strongly suggests that** judges should work to keep youth in their communities instead of placing them outside of their home. A support team should be identified for a youth when they enter the juvenile justice system. Youth need support and mentors to keep them out of trouble. Sentences for youth should fit both the crime *and* the age of the youth.

I think that kids should have alternatives to fees and fines, we need resources and people should recognize that kids do not have finances and having these fees and fines are a burden. ...People should recognize that as youth, we can change and services and programs help us. Youth should not be punished without any help or supports. - Bree

Juvenile justice involvement has long term effects on young people. Please do not alter the rest of our lives based on regular adolescent risk taking.

