

Stand for Children

Children's Rights

<http://stand.org/national/blog/cost-youth-prosecution>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

When my mother was too sick to care for my four younger siblings, I took them in a few years before she passed away because I didn't want to see them separated or wind up in foster care. At the time, I was a young mother of three and finances were already tight. My younger brother was around 12. Despite all my efforts to try to set him on the right path, he ended up going downtown and getting into an altercation. He went to juvenile detention. I protested to the courts about the tragedy that happened to us, but no one listened or cared. We still had to pay court fines and fees, which we couldn't afford. There was no assistance and no counseling or resources to help me deal with this issue that was all new to me.

On top of the court and probation costs, there was the gas or bus money to get to where he was, the cost of finding babysitters for my children, and the cost of making sure he had food, toothpaste, shoes and other necessities.

Things I didn't think I would have to do, I ended up doing: going to the food pantry, donating plasma, asking friends for help, and getting energy assistance. I had to miss work to beat court dates. It was a struggle, and my younger children didn't understand why we could no longer afford family activities like going out to eat or to the movies.

After he got out, I thought we would be OK, but then there were probation fees. I then had to decide between paying the costs to help secure his freedom, or not paying and having him continue to be dragged through the justice system.

It was a vicious cycle. We lived paycheck to paycheck for several years. Some months, not all the bills got paid. It was either pay for rent or the lights, or the fees. Something had to give, but it never did.

I want to see fines and fees eliminated from the juvenile court system so parents and caregivers don't have to choose between feeding their family or buying their loved ones freedom. I want to see these costs eliminated because kids shouldn't have this burden following them into adulthood. We all make mistakes.

I tried to lead my brother on the best path I knew how, but once he had the fees, it felt like I was doing the time as well. It was a huge burden and hardship on my family. It strained us and we no longer had financial stability. I wish he would have been given options to pay it off, like community service. I wish someone would have given me resources or guided me through the justice system, but no one did. It was a nightmare I wouldn't wish on anyone.

If you live in Indiana, [click here to join the movement](#) for youth justice reform.

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