

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i

January 31, 2024

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Hearing Time: 1:00 PM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 225

Re: SB2323, RELATING TO YOUTH FEES AND FINES

Aloha e Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquinto, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i hui, we are writing in **strong support** of SB2323, relating to youth fees and fines. This bill will prohibit the assessment of any fines, fees, or court costs against a person who was adjudicated for an offense committed during the person's minority, or against the person's parent or guardian, and discharges all related debt obligations assessed prior to the effective date of the Act. It also requires the Office of the Administrative Director of the Courts to submit a report to the legislature.

It is crucial to recognize that individuals who committed offenses during their minority often lack the financial means to satisfy fines, fees, and court costs. Subjecting them to such financial burdens can hinder their ability to reintegrate into society, making it more challenging for them to secure employment, housing, and pursue education. An inability to pay fines and fees may lead to extended legal troubles, creating a cycle of involvement with the criminal justice system and potentially contributing to higher recidivism rates.

Moreover, holding the parents or guardians financially responsible for the actions of their minor children may exacerbate existing economic disparities and place undue strain on families already facing challenges. By discharging related debt obligations, SB2323 takes a significant step towards fostering a fair and equitable legal system that acknowledges the unique circumstances surrounding offenses committed during one's minority.

Further, the provision requiring the Director of the Courts to submit a report to the legislature adds transparency and accountability, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of this bill.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth homelessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

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