

Local Elected Officials Sign-On Letter

Support for Passage of the Youth in Prison Bill Package

As local elected officials—city council members, county commissioners, judges, prosecutors, police chiefs and sheriffs—we strongly support raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 to 18. Michigan remains one of five states in the U.S. that automatically prosecutes 17-year-olds as adults regardless of the offense. This practice harms young people, threatens public safety, and weakens our local economies. We believe that raising the age contributes to a comprehensive, smart-on-crime, approach to public safety, which means working together—at the state, county, city and municipal levels—to ensure that we:

Keep communities safe - One of our core duties as local leaders is to ensure the safety of our communities. Research shows conclusively that 17-year-olds are much less likely to reoffend when placed in the juvenile system rather than the adult system. Rather than exposing youth to violence and trauma in adult jails and prisons, we should provide appropriate treatment that helps them become law-abiding citizens, avoids future victimization and improves community safety.

Keep kids in schools and include their families in local, developmentally-appropriate treatment - Michigan's juvenile justice system, which is primarily county-based, is designed to provide age-appropriate rehabilitative services as well as partner with schools, mental health, child welfare and family service providers to address the needs of youth and their families. Since most 17-year-olds are arrested for nonviolent, misdemeanor offenses, diversion and community-based programs in the juvenile courts could be especially successful and cost-effective. Unfortunately, 17-year-olds are currently prohibited from accessing these types of services.

Grant discretion to judges and prosecutors to make decisions on a case-by-case basis - The current law requires that all 17-year-olds be processed as adults, even if a judge or prosecutor thinks they would benefit more from treatment and services available in Michigan's juvenile justice system. Raising the age would give prosecutors and judges greater discretion and more tools to do their job. Further, the proposed legislation does not remove the option to waive youth to the adult system on a case-by-case basis.

Minimize costs and liability to local jails - Over half of arrested 17-year-olds spend time in local county jail, a cost which falls solely to the counties. According to the Prison Rape Elimination Act, local jails are required to separate youth under age 18 by sight and sound from adult inmates. This means that jails will need to fund physical layout changes, as well as additional staff positions, to meet the requirements designed to keep 17-year-olds safe. Michigan's juvenile detention facilities, on the other hand, are already designed, staffed and trained to provide services for this age group.

Strengthen the workforce talent pipeline - When adolescents are tried as adults, their conviction data is public and accessible to employers, housing, and education providers among others. If we don't raise the age, we are giving young people from states who were served by their juvenile justice systems, a competitive advantage over 17-year-olds in Michigan with the exact same offense. That's because while records of juvenile adjudications are not included in Michigan's public system for background checks, adult criminal records can result in lifelong barriers to housing, education and employment, depleting talent from our local economies.

In order to achieve this change, we urge the Legislature to monitor and adopt an appropriate funding amount and mechanism to cover the additional implementation costs associated with increasing the age of the juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 to 18. However, research from the Justice Policy Institute shows that other states who have raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction were able to reduce their costs over time, through investments in community-based services, and we can too.

Raising the age will align Michigan with national best practices, recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions, and other governing laws that define "youth" as any individual under the age of 18. Most importantly, it will keep our communities safer and provide opportunities for our youngest residents. **Therefore, we, local elected officials across the state of Michigan, urge the Legislature to pass the "Youth in Prison" bill package¹, and raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 to 18.**

To add your name in support of Michigan's Raise the Age campaign, please [sign-on here](#).

¹ The Youth in Prison bill package is inclusive of HB 4607, HB 4653, HB 4662, HB 4664, HB 4676, HB 4659, HB 4685, HB 4793, HB 4675, HB 4969, HB 4744, HB 4969, HB 4753, HB 4696, HB 4789, HB 4677, HB 4678, HB 4741