

# NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

## Raise the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction to 18 (House Bills 4133-4146)

We, at National Juvenile Justice Network, a network of advocates in 43 states and DC working to ensure youth justice policies are fair and effective for youth and families, strongly support legislation to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to eighteen.

At the national level, we have watched as states across the country have recognized that youth are uniquely capable of change and have raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 17-year-olds. In fact, Michigan is one of four remaining states that automatically prosecute 17-year-olds as adults for any offense. This antiquated practice is contrary to research, exceptionally harmful to youth and directly threatens public safety.

**Research shows that 17-year-olds cognitively differ from adults.** As part of normal development, youth are more likely to take risks, act impulsively, and are highly susceptible to the negative influences of peers. Though these age-related factors may contribute to youthful mistakes, 17-year-olds are more amenable to rehabilitative programs and behavior modification than older adult offenders. Furthermore, research shows that youth processed in juvenile courts, particularly when provided services at home, have lower recidivism rates than youth sentenced to adult facilities.<sup>1</sup> By reducing recidivism and collateral consequences that limit job prospects, Michigan would not only realize reductions in prison costs, but would nurture the growth of productive tax paying citizens.

Despite this, Michigan's current practice of charging 17-year-olds as adults, prohibits these youth from accessing youth-focused services and treatment found only in the juvenile system. If Michigan wants to reduce recidivism and increase public safety, it must take steps to provide the same highly effective, developmentally appropriate services and sanctions provided to 16-year-olds. Such services hold youth accountable, engage the whole family in treatment, keep kids in school, and reduce reoffending.

**Numerous states have recognized that public safety and youth are best served by providing developmentally appropriate responses and have subsequently increased their age of juvenile jurisdiction.** Those states found that "Raise the Age" has proven to be good fiscal policy. Initial estimates of the cost impact were inaccurate as juvenile crime has continued to decline. For example, Connecticut raised its age of jurisdiction in 2007. At that point, the fiscal note predicted that the cost associated with raising the age would continue to rise: \$36 million in 2010, \$78.5 million in 2011, and \$100 million in 2012. Yet, once implemented, Connecticut's spending on juvenile justice was lower in 2011-2012 than it had been 10 years earlier.<sup>2</sup> In fact, a recent report from the Justice Policy Institute found that states have raised the age without increasing costs but rather shifting the systems' resources to handle youth in trouble with the law more cost-effectively.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Facilitating the Transfer of Juveniles from the Juvenile to the Adult Justice System: A Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2007): 6-8 accessed April 4, 2013 at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5609.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Campaign for Youth Justice "The Impact of "Raise the Age" Laws" accessed Jan 11, 2018 via: <http://cfyj.org/images/factsheets/RTAImpactTwoPagerJune72016final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Justice Policy Institute. "Raising the Age: Shifting to a Safer and More Effective Juvenile Justice System." (March 2017) pg. 14, accessed January 11, 2018 at <http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/raisetheage.fullreport.pdf>.

In short, now is the time for Michigan to join the 46 other states already recognizing that 17-year-olds who come in contact with the justice system are still children. Raising the age better serves youth, reduces recidivism, increases public safety, and makes smart fiscal sense. It is for these reasons, we strongly support the proposed legislation to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18.