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June 7, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Hope and Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee,

We, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) are writing in support of the work of Michigan's Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform and believe that the approved consensus-based recommendations will help Michigan improve outcomes for youth and strengthen public safety.

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice is a nationwide coalition of State Advisory Groups (SAGs) and allies dedicated to preventing children and youth from becoming involved in the courts and upholding the highest standards of care when youth are charged with wrongdoing and enter the justice system. We envision a nation where fewer children are at risk of delinquency and if they are at risk or involved with the justice system, they and their families receive every possible opportunity to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

Many counties and courts across Michigan are already employing research-based policies and practices, and over the last several years, Michigan has made several improvements to its juvenile justice system. However, Michigan's juvenile justice system is still plagued by systemic challenges, as outlined in the [final report](#) issued by the Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform.

To address these challenges, we believe statewide policy changes are required and encourage bi-partisan legislative action during the 2023 legislative session and thereafter. The below bills support evidence-based and data-driven decision making. The Coalition for Juvenile Justice is in full support of the priority legislative package resulting from the Task Force. These bills include:

- HB 4624: Expanding use of the Child Care Fund
- HB 4625/4626/4628: Expanding the Diversion Act and using risk screening tools to inform diversion and consent decisions
- HB 4627: Using Risk and Needs Assessments to inform decision making
- HB 4629: Using a Detention Screening Tool to inform detention decisions

- HB 4630/4631: Creating a statewide juvenile defense system through MIDC and SADO
- HB 4634 – 4637: Eliminating most fines and fees for juveniles except restitution and the crime victims' fund
- HB 4638 – 4643: Expanding the Office of the Child Ombudsman to include juvenile facilities
- HB 4632: Allows DHHS to change per diem rates as needed
- HB 4633: Revises factors that should be considered by the court in making waiver and designation decisions

If these recommendations are enacted, Michigan can achieve key outcomes, including:

- Increasing the reimbursement rate in the Child Care Fund incentivizes jurisdictions to utilize community-based services in lieu of incarceration. The changes to the Child Care Fund that require the use of research-based practices and risk and needs assessments can increase system consistency and improve equity. Additionally, in other states this has led to reduced use of incarceration and cost savings. As proven by implementation in various states, this would lead to better investments of taxpayer dollars and reduced cost of state spending.
- Diverting low risk youth from the justice system will allow the juvenile justice system to focus its limited resources on those youth that are actually a risk to public safety. Housing less youth would require less funding and ensure that the funds and services being utilized can better support the youth inside. State resources could then amount to increased mental health services/behavioral health supports for incarcerated youth, ultimately leading to reduced recidivism rates.
- Establishing juvenile public defense statewide standards, training, and dedicated resources can ensure youth, no matter where they live, have access to qualified and committed legal counsel.
- Investing in quality assurance structures will ensure state and local agencies and providers are supported and held accountable for measurable improvements in recidivism and other youth outcomes.

The development of the Task Force's recommendations and the priority bill package has been a collaborative, research-based, data-driven process, and our members are willing to testify and advocate in support of their adoption. We appreciate the work of the Task Force and hope that the legislation receives the attention and support it deserves on behalf of Michigan's children and families statewide. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Coalition for Juvenile Justice Members