

RAISE THE AGE



Michigan Talking Points

Did you know that Michigan is 1 of only 5 states that automatically prosecutes 17-year-olds as adults for any offense?

1. **The majority of arrested 17-year-olds are charged with first-time, non-violent offenses**, like minor in possession of alcohol, shoplifting, vandalism, and disorderly conduct - teenage mistakes that are punished by the lifelong consequences of an adult conviction. With the proper guidance and support, young people have an incredible capacity for rehabilitation and change.
2. **All other state laws establish the age of adulthood at 18**, recognizing that children younger than 18 are not yet mature enough to vote, enlist in the military, serve on a jury, sign a binding contract, or purchase alcohol. Yet, if they become in trouble with the law, even for a minor, non-violent offense, they are automatically prosecuted as an adult, face a possible prison sentence, and can have a lifelong conviction.

Prosecuting youth as adults is harmful to kids, families and communities.

3. **HARMFUL TO KIDS: Youth incarceration is harmful, expensive and ineffective.**
Youth who are sentenced to jail or prison are more likely to be physically attacked, sexually assaulted, and to attempt suicide than youth in the juvenile justice system. Rather than teaching youth how to become productive adults, the trauma and violence experienced in adult facilities hardens them and makes them more likely to reoffend when released.
4. **HARMFUL TO FAMILIES: Parents should have the right to know if their teenager has been arrested.**
Although most 17-year-olds are juniors or seniors in high school who live at home, parents are often not notified if their child is arrested, nor included court hearing or sentencing. The juvenile justice system, on the other hand, recognizes the important role of families and seeks to engage families into the treatment process.
5. **HARMFUL TO COMMUNITIES: Raising the age will help ensure safer communities and fewer victims.**
Rather than perpetuating violence and jeopardizing public safety, we need a system that repairs the harm done to victims and communities. A restorative approach – like that provided in many juvenile justice systems - seeks to heal broken relationships, strengthen community bonds, and provide opportunities for youth to make amends for their actions.

The juvenile justice system can rehabilitate kids better than adult prison...

6. **AGE-APPROPRIATE SERVICES: Michigan's juvenile justice system is better equipped to provide age-appropriate rehabilitative services, keep kids in school, and engage the whole family.**
Michigan's juvenile courts already serve youth up to age 19 and, in some cases, age 21. Because most 17-year-olds have first-time, non-violent charges, many will likely be eligible for low-cost diversion and community-based programs. Michigan has seen a steep decline in caseloads and use of detention and out-of-home placement by as much as 50%, due to decreasing youth crime rates and increased community-based programs. This means that many youth placements have available bed space to serve 17-year-olds if need be.

7. MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT: The adult system is unable to address the unique needs of youth with trauma, mental illness, or developmental disabilities.

The majority of justice-involved youth have experienced abuse, neglect, foster care, mental health needs or have developmental disabilities. While the juvenile system is trained to address their special needs, the adult system is not. Juvenile courts have stronger partnerships with children's mental health agencies, and more familiar with accessing Medicaid dollars to provide services to youth with mental health needs.

8. DISCRETION: Raising the age provides greater discretion to judges and prosecutors.

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 diversion, community-based programs or juvenile residential treatment. Raising the age would not change the current option to waive youth to the adult system on a case-by-case basis.

The long-term benefits of raising the age far outweigh the short-term costs...

9. LONG-TERM COST-SAVINGS: Raising the age is the fiscally responsible thing to do.

Other states that raised the age have saved money and seen a decrease in youth reoffending and judicial caseloads. Convicting youth as adults is expensive and less effective. Youth incarcerated as adults stay in prison approximately four times longer than youth in juvenile facilities, making adult prison the more expensive and less effective long-term option.

10. BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Raising the age would strengthen the workforce talent pipeline and provide a pathway for young people to become productive, tax-paying citizens.

Adult convictions can create lifelong barriers to housing, employment and education. If a 17-year-old in Ohio, Illinois or Indiana commits the same crime, on the same day, as a 17-year-old in Michigan, that out-of-state youth can come to Michigan and gain acceptance into college and find a job, while the Michigan youth will face lifelong barriers when seeking education or employment, putting our residents at a competitive disadvantage. The Michigan youth will average 40 percent less in lifetime earnings than the youth from other states, increasing the likelihood of reliance on government assistance.

11. REDUCED LIABILITY TO ADULT JAILS AND PRISONS: Raising the age minimizes costs and liabilities to local jails.

Jails are currently required to keep youth under 18 separated from adult inmates. In order to comply with the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), many counties will see increased costs necessary to reconfigure their jails to separate 17-year-olds by "sight and sound" from older inmates, or risk lawsuits as a result of being noncompliant with federal law. Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction would allow 17-year-olds to be housed with other youth in existing juvenile facilities.

NOW IS THE TIME! Raising the age is the right thing to do for kids, families, and communities. Let's get smart on crime and RAISE THE AGE!