

Raise the Age: Protecting Kids and Enhancing Public Safety in Michigan

Executive Summary

All kids deserve the opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives. Yet Michigan puts kids at risk by being 1 of only 5 states that still automatically try 17-year-old arrestees as adults in criminal court. As a result, 17-year-olds in Michigan are subjected to a harsh criminal justice system that separates them from their families and limits their access to the services and education they need to rehabilitate.

In 2016, Michigan police made 7,215 arrests of 17-year-olds — more than 80% of these arrests were for nonviolent offenses, and more than half were considered misdemeanors. Though many of the kids involved in the criminal justice system have experienced extreme hardship, they are resilient and can turn their lives around. They deserve attention and treatment, not incarceration.

In this report, we evaluate the health and equity impacts of charging 17-year-olds in juvenile court rather than adult court, to inform legislation under consideration in Michigan that would raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 to 18 years of age.

Raising the Age improves health and safety

Michigan's juvenile justice system is far more developmentally appropriate for young people because it prioritizes community-based options, educational resources, and physical and behavioral health services that help youth get their lives back on track. Keeping 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system builds healthier and more productive young adults, improves community health, increases public safety, and saves us all money in the long term.

- The juvenile justice system includes the possibility to stay connected to family and community
- The juvenile justice system supports youth staying in school, which leads to better long-term health outcomes, job opportunities, and higher incomes
- Juvenile institutions offer treatment, rehabilitation, educational, and personal development resources
- Youth in the juvenile justice system recidivate less
- Keeping 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system decreases long-term costs to taxpayers

Youth tried in adult court are more likely to be convicted and receive harsh sentences

Youth who are tried in adult court are more likely to be convicted and receive harsh sentences than youth who remain in juvenile court, and are punished more severely than young adults (ages 18-24) who are charged for similar crimes.

The adult system is a costly, dangerous place for kids

Youth detained in adult facilities are significantly more likely to be beaten by staff, sexually assaulted, and commit suicide than youth in the juvenile justice system. Moreover, experiencing incarceration is damaging to kids' mental and physical health throughout their lives.

The State of Michigan cannot afford to continue subjecting 17-year-olds to the adult criminal justice system, because the cumulative costs — trauma, poor health outcomes, lost opportunities for youth, and lost tax revenue — are simply too high to ignore. The rise of alternative programming in Michigan has already contributed to fewer youth being sent even to juvenile justice facilities — now it's time for Michigan to follow the lead of other states to raise the age.

Visit www.humanimpact.org to read the full report and view references.

