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Testimony from:

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In SUPPORT of Senate Bills 84, 90-102
Raise the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction to 18

March 7, 2019

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Chairman Lucido and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jesse Kelley. I manage criminal justice research for the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including juvenile justice reform. Raise the Age legislation, such as S.B. 84 and S.B. 90-102, is of special interest to us.

The R Street Institute stands in support of Raise the Age legislation and encourages raising the age of criminal majority so that cases involving 17-year-olds may remain in the juvenile justice system. Michigan is one of only four states that treat 17-year-old youth as adults in the criminal justice system, which harms young people, the Michigan economy and local communities.

We would like to thank Chairman Peter Lucido for his continued and outspoken support of the goals this legislation would accomplish.

Children placed in the adult system are vulnerable to abuse, sent to solitary confinement and do not receive age-appropriate services. The R Street Institute believes that young people must be separated from the adult criminal justice system in order to preserve their physical and mental health and foster future economic success.

Allowing 17-year-old children to be included in the juvenile system would give them greater access to crucial educational and technical training. This leads to better opportunities upon release and an

increased chance to grow into responsible, productive adults. Michigan juvenile facilities teach youth educational and vocational skills based on market demand. Using tailored education methods with the goal of post-incarceration employment is something that benefits all juveniles, but would be most beneficial for older youth.

Opponents have voiced concerns over the potential costs of treating 17-year-olds as juveniles. However, if this legislation is passed, research shows Michigan can expect both long-term economic savings and public safety benefits.

Although the initial costs of housing these youths in juvenile facilities may be higher than housing them in adult prisons, a young person convicted in the adult system can expect to earn 40 percent less over his or her lifetime. In contrast, youth who were convicted of a crime but did not go to adult prison have almost as good a chance of finding a job as youths who never committed a crime. To further ameliorate cost concerns, this proposed legislation would create a Raise the Age Fund within the state treasury that would aid in offsetting additional implementation costs.

From a national perspective, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts and New Hampshire all passed Raise the Age laws despite enormous cost estimates. The feared million-dollar price tags of those laws never came to fruition, because the estimates did not account for the savings amassed from lower recidivism rates. Vincent Schiraldi, a senior research fellow in criminal justice at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, has studied data gathered from states that have raised the age, and suggests that treating 17-year-olds as juveniles may actually reduce public costs over time.

Please support and advance these pieces of legislation so that 17-year-olds can have the opportunity to better their futures and the future of Michigan.

Thank you for your consideration,

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