



REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON

Michigan Legislature
100 N Capitol Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933

March 7, 2019

Chairman Lucido and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee,

As the nation's largest ministry to people behind bars and their families, Prison Fellowship supports values-based justice reform, including efforts to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18 years in Michigan. Such reforms should work to ensure that punishment is proportional, people created in the image of God are treated in a way that reflects their inherent dignity, families and communities are safe and strong, and opportunities for second chances are extended to those who have paid their debt.

Under current law, 17-year-olds who commit a crime in Michigan are automatically tried in adult court and, if convicted, will carry an adult criminal record. In Michigan alone, there are 787 identifiable legal barriers to reintegration for adults with a criminal record. Moreover, when youth are incarcerated in adult facilities, they lack appropriate treatment and are exposed to conditions that degrade their dignity and harm their development. Data show that youth held in adult facilities are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted than youth in age-appropriate secure care. Upon release, they are 34 percent more likely to be rearrested later for a violent crime. Our values require better.

Michigan is one of only four states that automatically charges youth under 18 as adults, regardless of offense. In the juvenile justice system, youth receive age-appropriate accountability like mentorships, creative restitution practices, and diversionary programming. These strategies get to the root of the crime and foster lasting character development while advancing public safety.

Prison Fellowship advocates for a restorative response to crime, one that keeps neighborhoods safe while extending hope of a second chance. As lawmakers, you have been given the challenging charge of guiding the state's response to crime, ensuring that the system in place recognizes human dignity and the value of every individual.

We ask that you support all "Raise the Age" legislation before your committee and join the forty-six other states who have made this important investment in juvenile justice.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. DeRoche".

Craig DeRoche
Senior VP, Advocacy & Public Policy
Prison Fellowship