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To Chairman Kesto and the Members of the House Committee on Law and Justice:

My name is Jesse Kelley, and I am the State Affairs Manager for Criminal Justice for the R Street Institute; a nonprofit public policy research organization focused on evaluating policies related to criminal justice, the juvenile justice system and ways of effectively reintegrating the formerly incarcerated into society.

Specifically, the R Street Institute stands in support of the Youth in Prison legislative package 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 not only those young people but also the Michigan economy and local communities.

From our right-of-center perspective, the R Street Institute opines that young people must be separated from the adult criminal justice system to preserve their physical and mental health as well as promote their personal economic success in the future. Children who are placed in the adult system are vulnerable to abuse, sent to solitary confinement and do not receive age-appropriate services.

Allowing 17-year-old children to be included in the juvenile system would provide them with greater access to crucial educational and technical training. This leads to better opportunities upon release and an increased chance for them 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 in mind is something that benefits all juveniles, but would be most beneficial for older youth.

The higher age threshold for inclusion in juvenile court makes sense. There is a national trend underway to reevaluate crimes committed by young people and youth incarceration generally. That trend is a result of novel findings in the field of cognitive science and an associated recognition of the need for a more rehabilitative system that treats children – who are developmentally distinct– substantially different from adults. However, Michigan has neglected to recalibrate definitions of true adulthood to reflect these findings.

Raising the age will also have a long-term, cost-savings effect. The highest hurdle to overcome in passing raise-the-age legislation is cost. 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 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.

Moreover, evidence suggests that placing youth in adult facilities is detrimental to public safety. Young people placed into the adult system have significantly higher recidivism rates. Experts suggest some [reasons](#) for this increased recidivism could be “the label of convicted felon; the sense of injustice juveniles feel about being tried as an adult; the apprehension of criminal mores due to exposure to older, more sophisticated individuals; and the decreased focus on rehabilitation and family support in the adult system.”

From a national perspective, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts and New Hampshire all passed raise-the-age laws despite enormous cost estimates. The million-dollar price tags 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, who has studied data gathered from states that have raised the age, suggests that treating 17-year-olds as juveniles [may actually reduce public costs over time](#).

Please support and advance this bill so that 17-years-olds can have opportunities to better not only their futures but also the future of the Wolverine State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse Kelley", written over a horizontal line.

Jesse Kelley, Esq.
State Affairs Manager, Criminal Justice
R Street Institute