

Capitol Corner: Legislators Need to Finish the Job on Foster Care and Juvenile Justice

May 2, 2016 – Two separate sets of legislation important to children and families – one taking up the cause of 17-year-old teen offenders in adult corrections and the other impacting children and caregivers in foster care – deserve to become law this legislative session. But unless they clear both chambers and the Governor's office before the clock runs out on this legislative season, even the best ideas could fold like yesterday's news.

Campaigns take time, and with the summer campaign season fast approaching the reality is that even if an incumbent state office-holder isn't up for re-election, they very well will be called up to assist as their colleagues campaigning for seats in the Michigan House, U.S. Congress and the Presidency.

Let's revisit what's happened so far and what needs to happen next.

With overwhelming support, a package of bills cleared the state House last week that would change the state's practice of automatically sending 17-year-old offenders to the adult corrections system – an application that's made Michigan a rare outlier among states. The vast majority adjudicate 17 year olds as juveniles.

This was great news for child and family advocates including Michigan's Children, a supporter in the [Raise the Age Campaign](#). The package had broad bipartisan support, including bill sponsors from both parties, and moved quickly since being introduced in February. The bills now head to the Senate where it's yet unclear when they will be taken up. Recent changes in the package would delay implementation to 2018 so that Michigan could study the cost implications for county-based juvenile justice systems. Thank your Representative for moving quickly on these bills, and ask your Senator to urge their colleagues to also consider their discussion and package soon.

Moving less swiftly is another package of bills that have the potential to provide better support for children and youth in foster care and their caregivers. While not perfect, the three-bill package making up the Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act, [HBs 4976-4978](#), also has broad bipartisan support. Since being introduced in December 2015, the Michigan House Families, Children and Seniors Committee approved it, though it has yet to gain consideration by the full House.

Although the package holds promise for good changes for kids and families in foster care, the bills have been largely ignored by leadership in the House – those who have control over which legislation gets a vote on the House floor. With 13,000 in foster care in Michigan, though, advocates [must speak up](#) and urge our state lawmakers in the House and Senate to act without further delay. Ask your Representative to urge a House floor vote as soon as possible, and ask

your Senator to urge that the Committee take up the measures in short order so that they can make it through the process before the end of the Legislative session.

Timing is everything. Don't let two packages that promise improvements for kids and families in the state's care die on the vine. Contact your Senators and state Representatives today and tell them to move the Raise the Age and Assurance of Quality Foster Care packages.

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