

Kalamazoo youth share concerns, ask questions to Michigan political candidates

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Kalamazoo-area political candidates meet with area youth during an online forum on 10/14/20. (Photo via Google Hangout meeting).

KALAMAZOO, MI (WKZO AM/FM) — Wednesday, several Michigan political candidates joined an online forum hosted by [Michigan's Children](#), the Kalamazoo Youth Development Network ([KYD Network](#)), and the Michigan Center for Youth Justice.

Other participating community organizations in this forum included STREET Afterschool Program, ASK Family Services, Men of Purpose, Communities in School, and El Concilio Kalamazoo.

The purpose of the forum was so that area middle and high school students could ask questions of each candidate, including what their views are and what they plan to do about various issues if elected. It was also meant for youth to share their concerns as citizens.

The participants are candidates in the 6th Congressional, 60th and 61st House races. They included Kalamazoo County Commissioners Stephanie Moore, Christine Morse, and Julie Rogers, as well as State Representative Jon Hoadley.

Congressman Fred Upton, 60th House District Candidate Gary Mitchell, and State Representative Candidate Bronwyn Haltom were invited to the forum, but were absent.

“Young people have fundamentally different concerns from adults,” KYD Network Executive Director Meg Blinkiewicz said in a previous statement. “They don’t necessarily know who’s leading in the polls; they want to hear from all the candidates. They aren’t looking for politically correct answers, just straight talk.”

The online forum via Google Hangout started at 4:00 p.m. Wednesday. A recap of questions asked can be viewed below:

Question: How will you make youth justice and mental health programs more therapeutic and restorative, and less criminalizing and institutionalized?

Julie Rogers: “I think prevention is key, so making sure that we have mental and physical health parity,” Rogers said. “We really need to start with funding. The current Republican-lead legislature voted to have work requirements for Medicaid, and that has really cut benefits for many of our families. Making sure that we adequately fund mental health care and do work on the preventive side, I think,

is critical. Also making sure that we have better access, and that comes with funding our schools, encouraging young people to go into the mental health profession, because frankly we don't have enough mental health care workers."

Stephanie Moore: "You have to have the voices of the young people," Moore said. "To better understand the needs of the young people, you have to talk, listen and get the things you are interested in. The other biggest thing is understanding trauma. Adverse childhood experiences should be embedded in everything that we do, especially when we're talking about access, mental health services and opportunity to that, as well as therapeutic ways to do things. Make sure you have safe spaces to go and release, to talk, to make sure you have peer groups that you're doing. Understanding all of those needs, I did trauma-informed work at Kalamazoo County Government so all of our employees are trained or trauma-informed, and that goes into our policy and budgeting. I will definitely take that to the state at the next level knowing the many stories of young people here in the community, the challenges they face at school and at home and abroad, and making sure everything we do is trauma-informed, youth-lead and centered, and what we turn back around reaches and impacts the young people in a very specific way."

Christine Morse: "We all know that there aren't enough resources put into mental health, and like Commissioner Rogers said, we need to be concerned about whole-body health," Morse said. "I think an area that could really be helpful is getting more mental health programs into schools. Our kids are there every day, and a lot of what they're going through arise during school. School is providing a lot of needs already, but they're there so much we really should be providing more mental health resources, so we can meet them where they are and not make it difficult for them to get the help they need. Our schools are sort of overburdened with all the services they have to provide, but the thing is, that's where they are every day, so we really should work to increase that resource in school."

Jon Hoadley: "So first, why don't we make sure that we are tackling the school-to-prison pipeline, right?" Hoadley said. "The first question for so many of these issues is how we enter into the criminal justice or mental healthcare system period. We should be making sure that we are informing or encouraging trauma-informed policies, but also making sure that we're backing it up with laws that encourage people to work with students, instead of pushing them aside. As a State Legislator, I've actually supported stronger funding for many of these issues. When Commissioner Morse talked about more mental health for schools, we recently delivered a budget that had \$5.6 million in additional mental health funding for our schools. It's a drop in the bucket for what we need, but I was glad I was able to fight for that to get it in. Whether it's stronger licensing issues at the state for institutions that are in care-giving, criminal justice or therapeutic peace, or it's more support in the schools to end the stigma and improve access, we can do both of these things and I'm glad you're bringing attention to it."

Question: "If and when we go back to in-person learning, what are you going to do to keep children safe?"

Moore: "Safety and health is my main priority," Moore said. "Number one, making sure that, although the Supreme Court rules against some of the stuff with the Governor, we have an opportunity here locally through our Health and Human Services Department to enact those safety precautions. We are doing that. I've already publicly stated, and have asserted to our health officer, that this has to be mandatory. That we are social distancing, masks, making sure that those environments are clean, that we are doing everything we can to continue to teach, not just to kids, but their families and instructors of how to safely educate our young people."

Secondly, we also have to do a lot of education around this. It's not a matter of if we're gonna go back to in-person, it's when. And when we go, we need to be ready, we need to make sure everybody has the tools, the resources, the masks and the education that they need on top of going to school and getting an education, so that we protect our lives, our livelihoods, and our families. Having those conversations, I've met with our school superintendent, along with our health officer and school board trustees to talk about what this return will look like, what measures need to be in place, everything that needs to be mandated and enforced, and also the education that needs to go to the families, as well as the resources."

Morse: "The number one thing is #MaskUpMichigan," Morse said. "Really, it should be a no-brainer that we are wearing our masks, especially when we're mixing with people that we don't live with. My kids go to Portage Schools, I have a 5th grader who is actually going face-to-face four days a week, and they wear their masks all day. They do get brief periods where they get to take a break from it, but it really is the best way for kids to protect themselves and each other."

Again, school resources have been hard to come by. Like Commissioner Moore mentioned, we need adequate resources for cleaning. We're gonna have to make sure we are doing everything we can to keep those services clean, and make sure the kids are washing their hands, and that is an education component of continuing to make sure they know what they need to do to keep themselves safe."

Hoadley: "I think Commissioner Moore did a really good job of talking about the health implications, and Commissioner Morse talked about the resources we need," Hoadley said. "Let me just go on to say though, we are talking about staying safe and being healthy from COVID-19, but we still have a lot of other things we gotta worry about when we talk about being safe. We're still dealing with bullying, we've got to make sure we're putting pieces in place to protect our students, so when they go back, they also feel like they can be part of the community and be free from intimidation, discrimination or bullying."

I'm part of the generation that started to worry about gun violence, and that's not just in our schools, but in our communities. I'm so frustrated that politicians in D.C., and frankly so many of my colleagues in the state, have sat on their hands and did nothing when we could have put in place common-sense gun solutions so we can make our communities and schools safer. I know we're gonna get back and we are gonna get through this, and when we do, I hope we start tackling not only health issues, but so many other issues that impact student safety."

Rogers: “It ultimately comes down to funding, we want to make sure that our kids, teachers and staff are safe, and not everyone has the same access to resources,” Rogers said. “Making sure that the legislature appropriates additional funding, I know they did this cycle, but I’m concerned about continued cycles. I’ve spoken in the past with Rep. Hoadley about equitable funding, and not every student has the same needs. Instead of having the same funding for every student, [Unintelligible] getting additional funding to the communities that have greater needs.”

Question: What is your plan to shrink the wealth gap in our community?

Morse: “What we need to start with is a living wage at the bottom,” Morse said. “A lot of people think that \$15 minimally is where we should be for minimum wage. The other way we can impact is making sure that healthcare is affordable. There are so many times when people don’t have affordable healthcare and they have an issue come up, now they’re even further in debt because of that. We also need to make higher education more affordable and change the loan system. There’s many areas, but to me, the number one place to start is raising that minimum wage, and then moving from there into all the different areas where we need to try to bring people up.”

Hoadley: “First, we do know that education is a key part of that, that’s why I’m a big believer in making sure that we have high-quality public schools, and when you graduate, your next steps are up to you that we give support to,” Hoadley said. “If you want to move into skilled trades, some sort of career-tech focus piece, awesome. If you want to go to a community college or higher education, we need to make it so you’re not then mortgaging your future for decades paying off student debt.”

Secondly, I love the conversation about living wage. The best way to deal with people not having enough money is to pay people money so they can do their jobs and live for their families. This isn’t that complicated. Finally, I love the healthcare piece as well because it ties in with entrepreneurship. I was meeting with entrepreneurs in Benton Harbor just a couple weeks ago, and they were all doing their side hustles that they loved, but so many were doing actual jobs just to get the health insurance. Imagine if we could unlock their potential, where they could have insurance for themselves and families, and then focus on their business. Then we’re creating ownership, particularly it would be a way to empower more black and brown entrepreneurs.

Rogers: “The number one cause of bankruptcy in America is healthcare bills,” Rogers said. “Making sure everyone has access to adequate healthcare is going to go a long way in keeping money in people’s pockets. The other piece is living wage, I’m really proud that our County Board of Commissioners had a very in-depth conversation during our budgeting process for next year, talking about and encouraging administration to increase our wage for our lowest-level earners, to bump that up to \$15 over time.”

Moore: “This is one of the reasons why I support Men of Purpose,” Moore said. “You guys have black men leaders who are entrepreneurs who own their own businesses, who are transferring what they know, their skills and technology, right on to you all. You’re doing all the things that small black-owned business are doing. What we need to do is support women-owned, black-owned, minority-owned businesses, so when you all are coming up with your creative ideas for what you want to do, being able to have access to create a business plan, to be fully bankable to get a loan, but also to make sure that you are doing all you can, that you can work for yourself, hire your homeboys and homegirls, make your own money, and continue to invest and grow. That’s what I see for young people. I see your ability and talent of what you can do, and that’s exactly what I would do at the state house to make sure we understand the needs of us owning our own, employing our own, and making our own decisions, as well as having access to a livable wage, healthcare insurance, and making sure we’re taking care of our community, especially those that are already hard to hire. We can push all that back doing our stuff on our own.”

Question: Can you commit to invest to protect the environment?

Rogers: “When I was a kid growing up, we did not have curb-side recycling, and so I thought it was really important,” Rogers said. “I had learned about it at school and asked my family, and we had to pack that car full of all that recycling and bring it to the local recycler. We need to hold polluters accountable, we need to do more proactively to prevent pollution from reaching our drinking water, and invest in the sun and other renewable energies.”

There’s a lot of sun and wind, and we have a lot of creative ways we can diversify our energy in Michigan. For too long, we’ve relied on our coal and fossil fuel plants, and so I think the governor’s proposal, I absolutely support. She just needs a legislature that will support some of her green energy efforts.”

Hoadley: “Yes, I can support investing in the environment,” Hoadley said. “I have a track record, I have a 100 percent lifetime score as a legislator from the league of Conservation Voters, Sierra Club, and Clean Water Action. I’ve actually introduced legislation that would increase our renewable standards, have more energy efficiency, make green jobs right here in Southwest Michigan.”

Unfortunately, our current Congressman, Congressman Upton, has a lifetime score of 27 percent from the League of Conservation Voters, so on this issue there’s a clear difference. I know we’re gonna have to deal with the effects of the climate crisis for a long time, and we’re running out of time to get it right. That’s why I’m calling for bold change – I want to make sure that we are investing and supporting the environment, because it’s good for us, it’s good for our kids, it’s good for our future grandkids, and it’s the right thing to do.”

Morse: "In my County Commission district, we've actually had flooding from two lakes and the area surrounding it for going on three years," Morse said. "What the group found that was trying to address this problem is that there is nothing in place in our government to help people that are suffering from the impacts of climate change. I'm sure you all know there has been lots of flooding all over the State of Michigan. We need to put programs and resources in place so that when these things happen, we have a way to address them that doesn't require such an immense amount of creativity. It's been very hard to deal with that situation because things were not set up."

Again, protecting our water, making sure drinking water is safe, and continuing to stand on renewable energy, of course, we should be doing that as a state."

Moore: "Some of the things you heard are really good suggestions, but I want to keep it real with you," Moore said. "People that look like me and you live in neighborhoods like on the Eastside where you can smell that funky smell when you're driving through Riverview or wherever. People like you and I live in neighborhoods where there is smog and smoke, where we have asthma, upper respiratory issues, where we have more issues of cancer and health issues. Our grandma and grandpa, you see some people on oxygen, or they're going back and forth to the clinic and the doctor every day. That's because we live in environments that are much more toxic than people who don't look like us."

So the answer to your question is yes, I am a champion for environmental justice. Making sure that our land where we live, and even the buildings that you are in every day, whether it's the Boys and Girls Club or the Douglas, that is not on toxic land. Making sure that our air is breathable, and lastly, when we had a water crisis in Kalamazoo, I'm the one who led Kalamazoo County Government through that to make sure we didn't have another Flint issue or response. But even lead, we have lead paint, lead pipes in our houses, because we live in the oldest homes in our community. It is up to someone who knows us, how we live, where we live, and what we need to take that to Lansing and make life better for people that look like me and you."

Question: Many of us are exposed to gun violence in our communities daily. What do you think should be done to help stop the spread of gun violence?"

Moore: "I live right in the heart of the community on the Northside, born and raised, I live on Patterson street," Moore said. "I hear the gunfire, I see the bodies when they fall, I have to go out and grieve and support the mamas and daddies, and even you all as young people, as we are experiencing this high level of violence. And it's not just gunfire, we're dealing with people fighting, individuals that are jumping one from the other. Violence is violence, and it impacts all of us."

What do we do? It's simple. We gotta know the community, the people that live in it, and support them. Not just supporting them and saying 'stop the violence,' but supporting grandma and aunties and all of them that are struggling, so they can ground themselves to deal with the people in the community bringing all this violence and nonsense going on. We're having a hard time getting a handle because we're not fully supportive with money, resources, sound policies, but most importantly, attaching that to the community, the warriors that are in our neighborhoods that will stop this mess. It's not just legislation, it's about empowering the people. We have to support them with finances, legislation, and giving us a plan to be proactive, and not just responding when we hear all of these shots fire all day every day."

Hoadley: "Commissioner Moore has the right thing there, we have to empower people every single day to make sure that the people most connected have the biggest voice in the solution, so she's right, 100 percent right," Hoadley said. "The other thing we can do from a legislative perspective is making sure we're tackling some of the other causes that perpetuate gun violence. We should have a universal background check to make sure that people who aren't supposed to have guns aren't getting them."

We need to have red flag laws, it's an issue I've supported. People wanted to give me a hard time about that, but when folks are struggling with mental health or a domestic abuse situation, there should be a way to temporarily remove firearms after a due process so they're not perpetuating violence. We also need to make sure more people have more opportunity, this is where the economic and healthcare pieces come together. Last but not least, we have to make sure we recognize that violence is causing trauma now. It's been said earlier, but we need to update our systems, our schools, the places that are interacting with folks actually have a trauma-informed approach to care."

Rogers: "It seems gun violence has been rising again, we were doing better with it a few years ago, but now it's upticked," Rogers said. "The families that are affected are not just the ones that have been a victim of gun violence, it affects the entire community. I don't think there's one answer, but I do think one of the low-hanging fruits is some of the Red Flag laws. We did pass a County Commission resolution supporting that, as well as comprehensive criminal background checks."

I am a gun-sense candidate of distinction, and I think many of us on this call support some of those smart reforms. It's going to take both community partnership and law enforcement working together in making sure that we build back those community partnerships. Community policing has worked in the past, and I think we need to strengthen that as well. Building trust with our families and law enforcement, and making sure you have one accountable person per neighborhood."

Morse: "My colleagues here pretty much covered everything, so I'm gonna cut it down," Morse said. "It's common-sense gun laws mixed with community support and resources and putting it together. It's a multi-pronged approach, and like they said, it's making sure people are getting educated and they have good jobs they can make a living wage at, and making sure mental health services are available. It's so many areas that we can make an impact on, and we should."

Question: How are you planning to dismantle or reallocate some funding spent towards student resource or security officers in schools towards more restorative practices in response to bad behavior?

Hoadley: “Obviously the way schools spend their local budget is a local school board issue,” Hoadley said. “I would highly encourage you to make sure you’re researching all the folks that will be on your school board ballot. But that said, there’s a lot of things we can do through the state and federal government that pushes us in the right direction. We need to pull out of place the things that are perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline.”

A big piece is that we should make sure we’re asking schools, specifically, how they’re spending some of their budgets on these issues. We can make sure we are incentivizing, through higher reimbursement rates or special grants, programs that actually are supporting restorative justice. That’s a choice we could do and encourage. Additionally, at a federal level, we need to make sure that we’re putting some guidelines in place where we could actually set some legislation that provides baseline protections for everybody in the country. It shouldn’t just depend on whether you have a good school board or not, because the choices being made in how they spend money or allocate resources could impact you for the rest of your life.”

Rogers: “I do agree with Representative Hoadley that it is a local school board decision, but my opinion is that we do need to do a better job with ending that school-to-prison pipeline,” Rogers said. “Again, making sure our school staff is trauma-informed and has some specific training, some anti-racism equity training. Also, making sure that we have baseline information on our students, and that our staff is aware of issues that may have happened in the past.”

It also needs to be customized, it’s not a one-size-fits-all approach. Making sure we’re meeting the needs of the students where they’re at, and again, it ultimately comes down to funding. So looking at ways that we can incentivize schools that are doing the right thing, and providing grant opportunities, and possibly some public-private partnerships.”

Moore: “The short answer to this is that you do not need police officers in schools with guns trying to do anything with children,” Moore said. “We need nurses, social workers. What we need are school counselors that have the ability to also help you all as students deal with all of the stresses and anxieties that you’re dealing with, on top of dealing with your school schedules. What we need to make sure is, regardless of whether we’re on the school board or not, we’re telling them what our expectations are and our intentions in helping to empower moms and dads and caregivers in the community to say, ‘listen, we do not want our children having interactions with law enforcement in the schools,’ and they’re not even having interactions with schools, therapists, counselors and social workers.”

Second of all, that money needs to be reallocated to support other programs. I coached Girls on the Run for so long, I see many of you here are middle schoolers, we need to make sure you have access to the arts, technology. That money could be better spent supporting you all as students and in your families. I will make sure to take that to Lansing, I would advocate for that for you. Equity needs to be fair and just, and to do that, you gotta know the people. I know you all, I live among you all, I work with you all in the school and your parents that support you, so I’m the one that can actually get this done for you in Lansing.”

Morse: “I would just reiterate what I said earlier about more mental health resources and what Commissioner Moore said,” Morse said. “Better-prepared school staff, so the issues are handled to the point of some allegation of criminal activity. There’s a lot of help that kids could receive before they get to the point of some sort of intervention, and I truly hope we can build that back into our schools by providing the resources to do that.”

Question: How are you going to hold schools accountable for when they’re not accommodating IEP’s (Individualized Education Program) for virtual learning?

Morse: “I have to imagine that this is a major difficulty with virtual learning in the time of a global pandemic,” Morse said. “I don’t have the answer, but I would absolutely rely on the experts to help guide us on ways we can make sure kids needs are being covered, even in this time of virtual schooling. I’m sure each district is doing it differently, so if I was elected to be a representative, I would certainly reach out to them all, see what methods we are using. I’m here to learn, listen and figure out a way that we can make sure those needs are met.”

Rogers: “I think this is a very tough one, I think schools are trying their best, but at the end of the day, we need to make sure every child and their individual needs are met,” Rogers said. “I actually had one of my physical therapy clients, one of the parents, bring this issue up to me, and I did recommend that they follow up with the school administrator. I’ve mentioned this to school board members as well. The answer is that it’s not going to be one-size-fits all, so every child, we need to make sure their needs are being met. I think we needed to give the schools a little grace for that first month, but now that we’re into the semester and they’ve gotten their bearings, we need to make sure they’re giving options that are meeting the child’s needs.”

Moore: “Me and you both know what an IEP is,” Moore said. “That means that they’re mandated to give children an individualize plan according to their needs, situations and what they need to get done, so there’s no way it could be one-size-fits-all. Second of all, this is mandated. What I’ve done in the past, when I have young people that are struggling with this, I help advocate with their parents. We go to the school, to the administration, I’ll go in the room. We have professionals that help advocate to make sure that those children have a plan, that the school is following the plan, and that the parent is being supported to make sure their child is successful on that plan.”

Now that we're virtual in learning and children are at home with their parents, that plan is still in place, and now the school has to have adequate support for the parent or the caregiver where those children are during school hours. It doesn't mean you don't get the support because you're not in a school building. We have to work with organizations like KYDNet and every organization around the table right now to have those ongoing supports for students and parents, and hold the school district accountable that those plans are being followed every day consistently."

Hoadley: "To add to those pieces, there's actually still, through the Michigan Department of Education, a number of ways to hold the school district accountable, including independent or third-party dispute resolution," Hoadley said. "If anyone needs help accessing those services, just call my office and we can help figure out what you need to do. Through the Michigan Department of Education, you're entitled to have someone try to resolve these disputes."

Question: How will you address the mental health crisis in this country while giving youth a seat at the decision-making table?

Moore: "I have been the one championing making sure that the youth create the table, and we come and sit at it to listen and talk and learn from you all," Moore said. "All of this has to be driven by you all, by young people, and we support your work while elevating your voices. Mental health is a serious issue, and it doesn't just mean that people are crazy, and this and that. A lot of young people are dealing with stress and anxiety, they're being bullied, they're having to deal with not having the right clothes or access to school, which creates even more anxiety."

You have to know and understand the childhood experience. What that is today, especially in the realm of social media, and what that could even do with even video taping kids fighting and stuff like that. Understand that I follow you all, I know a lot of things that are triggers, and knowing that, we can take that to the room and ask to create policies and budget that will bring you support and relief. Mental health is not a bad thing, having support is not a bad thing, you just need to know the right support, who needs to get it, how it connects in contact with you all. We can do that by having you all set the table. You lead the conversation. We listen and learn, and we can put it to work where we want to.

Hoadley: "We have so many systems in place that are supposed to hear from the people they're serving, but somehow things don't keep changing," Hoadley said. "If we're gonna have youth design mental health space and services, I think that's great. I'm someone who believes that the communities most impacted should be designing these purposes to help solve the problem. But at the same time, there's no money for this, because so many people, when given the choice to either fund mental health or give a tax cut to someone that did them a favor, or they play golf with, they take the easy ride out and say there's nothing left for our mental health, for our schools, for our environment."

It's time for us to say that there's nothing left for us to give those types of politicians. I just want to say, I fully support your work for mental health. I love that analogy that Stephanie [Moore] said, you should make the table and have us come sit at it. Let's make sure we stop letting people give away dollars that we need to the richest corporations or the wealthiest Americans.

Morse: "First of all, our title, whichever of us wins our elections, our title is representative, so that means we are here to represent you," Morse said. "I know all of us are ready and willing to listen to what the needs are and really try to help in whatever way we can. Like was mentioned before, money is what is needed to be put in the places where people need it, like mental health services. I hope that kids today feel like we understand they are, especially in the age of COVID, under so much stress and anxiety about what's going to happen next. [Unintelligible]."

If I am elected, my job as representative is to be here to listen, and I will be ready to do that, and put some funding where it's needed.

Rogers: "Mental and physical health are treated differently, so we need to fund mental health as well as we fund physical health, and that also means getting rid of work requirements for Medicaid," Rogers said. "Also, having more youth forums. This has been really educational for me, so thank you to everyone who has been participating. Having more round tables, getting youth input. Don't be shy about attending one of our County Meetings. They're on Zoom right now, hopefully that's going to continue. Then, making sure we are listening to the voices that are most affected by these issues."

Question: We have been experiencing a lot of protests recently. How are we going to keep those safe and secure?

Morse: "First of all, it is a right under the constitution," Morse said. "It is freedom of speech for people to protest peacefully, and they should be allowed to do it and they should in fact be protected when exercising that right. Our police need to look at their procedures in how they're handling the protests and what their approach is. If we're looking at it that they should be protecting the protest, I feel like that's a good start, because that's where we should be. I know sometimes it can get hard because people are very emotional and have a big stake in all of these issues, and I understand it can get heated at times. But we really need to do our best to work together to make sure people can exercise that right freely."

Moore: "I was in a protest, a Black Lives Matter protest, we were walking from Western campus, marching downtown to the park," Moore said. "A motorist drove her car right through our protest, almost ran down some protesters. No one, especially not the person I'm running against, said a word about it, didn't say hold this person accountable, file a police report or anything. I'm the only one to make sure we are keeping us safe as we are raising our fist, chanting 'Black Lives Matter,' and demanding justice for innocent people that have been killed."

I would say keeping us safe is making sure that our neighborhoods and our community are empowering the people. The police is good, but since we got people that look just like me and you that can do this work, can keep us safe, can draft the plans and represent us in elected office, we just need to have the door open, be accepted and be able to walk in, so I can bring more youngsters just like you coming up to be able to do this work, and keep your family, neighborhood, school and community safe as well."

Rogers: "I think we need to hold police accountable," Rogers said. "Like Commissioner Morse said, the right to peacefully protest is an absolute right that this country was founded on. I'm very happy [Sheriff Fuller is now finally bringing forward purchase of body cameras for his county police](#), I think that's really important and going a long way to protecting citizens rights. Not only will those cameras be implemented, but the IT support to make sure the videos are preserved and accessible to FOIA is equally important.

I think this has been a watershed moment in this country, and I'm really happy to be part of a commission that has listened to the community. When the community wrote us emails and letters to defund or re-prioritize the police, we heard them, and I'm very pleased we're moving forward with the body cameras, which we've been talking about for over five years."

Hoadley: "What we do know is that the vast majority of protests across the country have been safe," Hoadley said. "People were wearing masks, people took it upon themselves to make sure that they were holding each other accountable, being peaceful about making their voices heard. Moving forward, we have to continue supporting that type of work. I think from a broad perspective, there's things we need to fundamentally fix, both in public health and public safety.

We should make sure that the law enforcement that is serving our community is from our community, that looks like us. We should set minimum standards in place so that regardless of what town you're in, there are certain things that we know won't be allowed. That's why I support things like banning chokeholds, supporting body cams, and anti-bias training, because we need to make sure our law enforcement have those pieces in place.

At the same time, we should always be taking precautions to keep us healthier, to keep us mentally and physically safe at these gatherings. When there is violence that occurs, particularly if people are trying to have violence against the protesters, we absolutely need to call that out and hold that accountable, because that's not right. It's not right in any context, but there are additional implications."

Question: What is your plan to curb the trend of prisons being filled with 60% of people who look like me?

Hoadley: "We have to fix our criminal justice system, hard stop, that's just true," Hoadley said. "I'm proudest in the legislature to support things that both fix some of the bad laws, and try to prevent folks from ever having to come into contact with the criminal justice system. I'm someone who has said we need to take concrete action to stop the school-to-prison pipeline. I'm someone who has voted for criminal justice reform, [I voted for the Clean Slate legislation](#) for those that have had previous interactions with the criminal justice system.

I've also looked and worked in a bipartisan way to readjust so many of our laws, because we were locking people up that had no business being locked up. Then, we were denying future opportunities, which only encourage people to seek additional bad behavior. I'm proud that I've been able to do a lot of work with diversion courts, including securing \$400,000 in additional funding for diversion and treatment courts. So instead of just being the decision where people lock folks up, let's actually take care of the underlying issues that may have caused the criminal infraction to begin with."

Morse: "Another area is bias in policing, because we all know on this call that is happening," Morse said. "Doing things like Jon mentioned, which is getting more people of color on the police, community policing so there's a relationship to begin with, and then addressing personal biases people bring to the job that we need to deprogram.

Those are some great places to start, along with all the work that's already being done on criminal justice. There's a lot more to go, and if I make it to the state legislature, I look forward to being a part of that continued work."

Rogers: "We need to look at who is in our jail, and low-level offenses like driving on a suspended license, or without a license, the jail is not the place for those people," Rogers said. "Also, individuals with mental illness often are picked up on some small infraction, and again, jail is no place for someone with a mental illness. I'm glad the County Board of Commissioners could put money in our budget next year to have two mental health workers in our jail to make sure people that are there with mental illnesses. [Unintelligible].

Failure to appear rates are a problem in our county, and something that was implemented was a text messaging program. You used to get a letter in the mail when you failed to appear in court, and sometimes those letters got lost. So utilizing technology is an innovative way to curb some of those small infractions or mistakes."

Moore: "First of all, we're talking about a system like it was designed to help us or support us. It doesn't," Moore said. "The system is doing exactly what it was designed to do, which is to put people that look like me and you in jail, which is another form, not just of incarceration, but slavery, and we need to end it. We need to totally bust down this whole system, and we can do that with policy. Policy that is equitable and fair to make sure you are not racially profiled in your community.

Number two, policy that says we will not have officers with guns in your school that are sending you through the process. Number three, we will make sure that we don't have private prisons. It's profitable, they make money off of us going into prisons, being housed there and working for pennies. It's another form of slavery.

We have to be real with what's going on here. The system, for so long, has not been fair or just for black and brown and poor people. We need to change the structure, and how we do that is getting people who like, love and support black brown and poor people, know our issues, and know what to do when we get into a position where decisions can be made, where budgets can be had to make sure we're not falling in between that gap to make the disparities even greater.

Raising money to get numbers is not helping us stay out of prison. What we need is to tear down the system."

Final Question: What inspired you to run for state legislator, and what will you do on your first day when you get the job?

Hoadley: "I first ran for office as a state legislator because I believe in a Michigan that invests in people," Hoadley said. "I want to make sure we're putting people and community at the center of decisions that are being made. After serving for six years in the state legislature, I believe in that even more. I made the decision to run for U.S. Congress because that needs to happen in D.C. as well.

For too long, the people who could write the biggest checks had the biggest say, even here in Southwest Michigan, and that's not right. I want to make sure we're putting people and community at the center of decisions, and I can do that with your help.

The first thing I'm gonna do is open our constituent offices so we can stay in contact. The second thing I'm gonna do is schedule a town hall. Our current representative doesn't do in-person town halls, and I think you should have to talk to the folks you're supposed to represent. That's something I could do to stay in contact, and it represent a change here in Southwest Michigan."

Rogers: "My physical therapy patient stories are really what motivated me to run," Rogers said. "Too many people are having to choose between putting food on the table and their prescription medications or health care. We need to do more to make sure families have access to health care. Also, making sure our public health with COVID, our public health departments and our counties have resources.

On day one, I would like to have a welcoming open office, and make sure we strengthen and continue to uplift our district service office. Doing a listening tour, making sure all areas of the district, including youth, are represented, and we listen to the ideas all of you have.

Moore: "I was inspired because I was a young black girl that grew up on the Northside in Kalamazoo. The entire time, I've never seen anyone that looks like me, anyone that ever came from our community, to actually serve in our state legislature," Moore said. "I would be the first black woman, especially the first from the Northside of Kalamazoo, to serve in our state legislature. It's not just about young black women, but it's also about Hispanic, Latinx young ladies and boys, to have representation.

We don't have what we need because, not only have we not had real representation, but we haven't had people checking for us. Now, we can have someone checking for us, helping to get some checks written to us. In terms of education, housing, entrepreneurship, economics, employment, those are the things we need in our community.

On top of the legislation and the budgeting, we need representation. I want you young ladies to be able to aspire what you can see to have access to what you need, and have your voices heard. My first day, I'll be setting up a time for you all to come to Lansing, we'll have a party, and then we're gonna get to work with you telling them folks what we need to do to have a better quality of life for our family and friends in Kalamazoo, especially black and brown and poor people who have been left out of the conversation for decades.

It's time for us to have representation and real access so we can have everything that everybody else too."

Morse: "I initially ran for County Commissioner because I wanted a leader for our district that was representative, accessible and transparent," Morse said. "A lot of people want that, and a lot of you are paying attention to what your politicians, your government leaders are doing, and it's so important. We all need to be held accountable so that we get the work done we say we're gonna do.

I would like to walk in that first day and mandate coverage for pre-existing conditions. Bam. Just pass it, day one. I realize it's not likely, but hopefully we'll have a fun office opening, and we'll be safe enough at that point to welcome our constituents."

Further Reading:

- [Official website for Bronwyn Haltom](#)
- [Official website for Jon Hoadley](#)
- [Official website for Gary Mitchell](#)
- [Official website for Stephanie Moore](#)
- [Official website for Christine Morse](#)
- [Official website for Julie Rogers](#)
- [Official website for Fred Upton](#)

Organization Links:

- [Michigan's Children](#)
- [Kalamazoo Youth Development Network \(KYD Network\)](#)
- [Michigan Center for Youth Justice](#)
- [STREET Afterschool Program](#)
- [ASK Family Services](#)

- [Men of Service](#)
- [Communities in School](#)
- [El Concilio Kalamazoo](#)

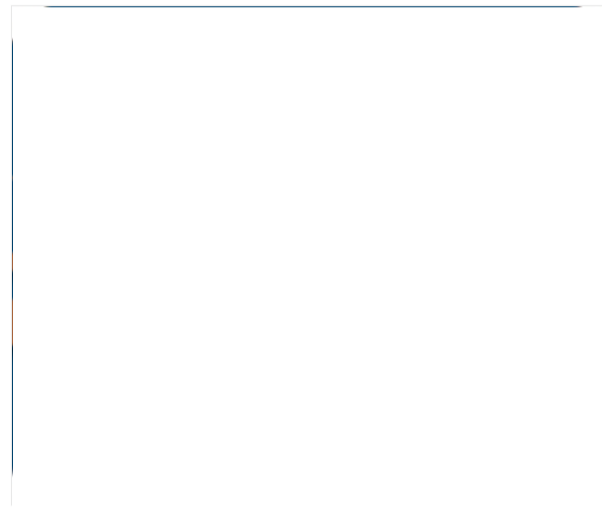
In addition, organizers of the forum spoke with WKZO Wednesday morning to talk about the program. That interview can be listened to [at this link](#).

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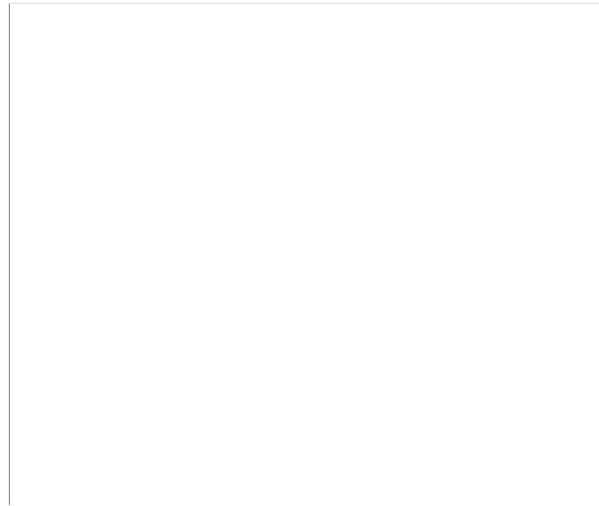
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