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Immediate release

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‘We Are the Change’ Youth-Led Candidate Forum in Six House Races is this Thursday

*Young People looking for ‘Straight Talk’ on Issues - bullying, disability rights, gun control,
foster care*

Young people from the Flint and Lansing areas who have faced challenges in their lives will lead a candidate forum in six mid-Michigan House races on **Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 (4:00–5:30 pm)**, raising issues such as bullying, disability rights, gun control and foster care.

“We Are the Change” forum is sponsored by [Michigan’s Children](#), [Peckham Youth Services](#), the [Institute for Educational Leadership](#), and the [Capitol Area College Access Network](#), and features eight young people between the ages of 16 and 24 with a range of experiences with disabilities and the justice system. Some have had court-involvement and are working through Peckham’s Right Turn Program in Lansing and Flint, and others are students with disabilities from Lansing Schools. Today, they’re working on the next phase of their lives through postsecondary education and career training.

Brittany Flowers, WLNS-TV news reporter, will moderate. [Media interviews can be arranged in advance of the forum by contacting teri@michiganschildren.org.](mailto:teri@michiganschildren.org)

The event will be streamed on Facebook Live. To watch the event, rsvp [here](#) and then click the "join event icon" or follow this link: <https://tinyurl.com/yy5afplr>.

Invited candidates from the Flint area are: Democrat Cynthia Neely and Republican James Miraglia (34th District); Democrat Sheryl Kennedy and Republican David Martin (48th District); Democrat John Cherry and Republican Bryan Lutz (49th District). **Candidates from the Lansing-area are:** Democrat Kara Hope and Nate J. Ross (67th District); Democrat Sarah Anthony and Republican Robert J. Atkinson (68th District); and Democrat Julie Brixie and Republican Grace Norris (69th District).

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, candidates are invited to attend virtually. Peckham students enrolled in the Lansing campus will have the option to attend in-person with safety protections and social distancing in place.

“Our students have had unique experiences with multiple systems and we all need to listen,” said **Sarah Britton, Director of Prevention and ReEntry Services, at Peckham.** “They have

something important to say about their experiences, the hurdles and the brokenness of some of those systems. Their voices matter.”

Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs for Michigan’s Children, said the youth-led forum offers an important opportunity for office-seekers to learn first-hand how well public systems work for young people and how they can be strengthened.

“Unfortunately, our state fails many of our young people, especially those struggling with daily challenges,” Corey said. “This forum presents candidates with important information about improving systems to better serve our youth and society.”

The forum is part of a three-day leadership training program for the participating youth, said Francine Francis, Senior Program Manager for the Center for Workforce Development at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL).

“**Youth voice** is critical in identifying the most relevant policy initiatives, and youth leadership in civic engagement is essential to ensure these initiatives have staying power,” Francis said. “IEL supports young leaders to create their vision, lead conversations about policy, and build powerful networks to make change happen. Today’s events are part of this long history of youth with disabilities making a difference.”