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Immediate release

Area Youths Lead Candidate Forum in Congressional & House Races Wednesday

Young People looking for 'Straight Talk' on issues including juvenile justice, afterschool, mental health, school services

#YJM2020 #KalamazooYouthForum

A coalition of state and local youth-serving organizations are bringing Kalamazoo-area youth together in a special forum on **Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2020** (4:00-5:30 pm) to engage candidates for Congress and state House on issues they're most concerned about - juvenile justice, afterschool services, school supports and mental health.

Invited candidates include: Incumbent Republican **Fred Upton** and Democrat **Jon Hoadley**, in the 6th Congressional District; Republican **Gary Mitchell** and Democrat **Julie Rogers** in the 60th House District; Republican **Bronwyn Haltom** and Democrat **Christine Morse** in the 61st District. Also included is announced write-in candidate Democrat **Stephanie Moore** in the 60th House District. There are no incumbents in either House race.

Principal sponsors include [Michigan's Children](#), the [Kalamazoo Youth Development Network](#) (KYD Network), and the [Michigan Center for Youth Justice](#), **highlighting October as Youth Justice Action Month**. Other participating community organizations include STREET Afterschool Program, ASK Family Services, Men of Purpose, Communities in School, and El Concilio Kalamazoo.

Based on their lived experiences, the young people will bring a unique perspective to a nontraditional forum with questions that require them to think deeply about community issues, said KYD Network Executive Director Meg Blinkiewicz. "Young people have fundamentally different concerns from adults," Blinkiewicz said. "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."

Michele Corey, Michigan's Children's Vice President for Programs, said that it's important for political hopefuls to hear from young people. "Unfortunately, our state fails many of our young people, especially those struggling with daily challenges. This is an important opportunity for candidates to learn first-hand what those challenges are and how together we can help overcome them."

Jason Smith, Director of Youth Justice Policy at the Michigan Center for Youth Justice, said the forum provides a timely opportunity for youth to probe candidates about their positions on youth justice initiatives and policies. "It's an opportunity for them to ask questions directly of candidates to ensure how – if elected – they will use their offices to ensure that Michigan's justice system is fair and effective," he said.

Media are invited to join the forum and hear the conversation. It is housed on the Google Meets platform. Because the event is youth-focused, questions won't be taken from the audience. To join: <https://meet.google.com/gkw-zpow-bog> (US) +1 337-466-9942 PIN: 276930483# View more phone numbers: <https://tel.meet/gkw-zpow-bog?pin=1683938053661&hs=7> Interviews with forum organizers and participants can be arranged by contacting teri@michiganschildren.org. The forum will open with brief remarks from each candidate. Students will take turns asking questions from their respective gathering locations. KYD Network's Stacy Jackson, the Out-of-School Time Program Coach, will moderate. After the questioning, students will "vote" in a mock election.