

Change is Coming: Youth and Michigan's Justice System Key Takeaways

- The Michigan Juvenile Justice Task Force was formed after two high-profile events that illustrated the need to reform the Juvenile Justice System in Michigan: the detainment of a teen, 15, for failing to do her homework (a probation violation) at the height of the pandemic, despite an executive order to reduce young people in these facilities; and the death of a teen from foster care who was unlawfully restrained in a facility designed for youth involved in delinquency cases.
- John Casteel, a former adjudicated youth, recovering addict, and involved father of two boys today, joined the task force to offer real-world, insider knowledge of the system, its failings and benefits. He told Matt Gillard the system helped save his life.
- Castell and MCYJ's Jason Smith said the task force voted unanimously on nearly all of the 32 recommendations, but one area of discussion that didn't reach full agreement was where to set the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction. The members settled on age 13.
- A major achievement in their work was agreeing to eliminate fines and fees that have left already strapped juveniles and their families in a financial hole they've been unable to climb out of for years, if at all, the guests said. "Poor youth are forced into taking the time (incarceration) over paying restitution every time," Casteel added.
- The Michigan juvenile justice system is decentralized, operated county by county. Because of its decentralized nature, a central theme for their work was to prevent "justice by geography," which would continue to exacerbate racial disparities, Smith said.