



MICHIGAN CENTER *for* **YOUTH JUSTICE**



Voices of Justice fellows from left to right: Arrianna Jentink-Bristol, Jamarion Lawhorn, Diamond Cotton, and De'Ronnie Sparks. Not pictured: Joseph Robinson and Bilal Abdul Abda Al-Raed.

Voices of Justice Fellows Take On Capitol Day

Earlier this month, MCYJ brought the *Voices of Justice* Youth Fellows to Lansing for our annual Capitol Day — and they made their voices heard.

Inside the halls of the Michigan Capitol, our fellows met face-to-face with lawmakers to share their stories and speak out on the issues that matter most to them. Each fellow presented their advocacy project, covering topics like mental health support, juvenile defense, school to prison pipeline, and more. These powerful conversations helped legislators better understand the challenges faced by justice-impacted young people and what real solutions can look like when youth are at the center of the conversation.

Capitol Day wasn't just about education and advocacy — it was about empowerment. For many fellows, this was their first time at the Capitol. They walked away with a stronger belief in their ability to lead change.

We're incredibly proud of these emerging leaders. Their courage, creativity, and commitment to building a better future remind us why we do this work.



Pictured: Voices of Justice fellows Diamond Cotton and Joseph Robinson meet with Michigan House Representative Jimmie Wilson Jr.

What's Going On In Lansing

Senator Santana's (D-Detroit) SB 78 bill passed out of the State Senate on May 20, 2025, with bipartisan support. The bill would expand expungement eligibility for certain serious crimes committed by individuals as minors. This process is not automatic and would require a court to review and approve the expungement request.

To be eligible, the following requirements must be met:

- The felony must have been committed before the person turned 18 years old.
- The person must have no criminal convictions since turning 18, and at least 15 years must have passed since their release.
- Additionally, at least 10 years must have passed since the most recent criminal conviction, and the individual must not have any pending criminal charges or have tested positive for illegal drugs since the felony they are seeking to expunge.
- The person must demonstrate a record and reputation indicating they are not likely to pose a danger to others.

Opportunities to clear one's record are vital to removing long-term barriers to housing and employment. The bill now advances to the Michigan House of Representatives. We're also following HB 4506 and 4508 closely. These bills, introduced by Representative Sarah Lightner (R-Springport), shift sentencing guidelines for 18—to 20-year-olds convicted of serious crimes. The proposed process would allow prosecutors to petition the court to sentence the individual to life without parole (LWOP), but it's not automatic. If the prosecutor does not file a motion or the court denies life without parole, the individual must receive a term of 35 - 50 years (minimum) or 80+ years (maximum). It's important to note that this applies to future cases and allows for resentencing of people already incarcerated. It also allows for considering developmental and individual factors before imposing the harshest sentence.

Our key takeaways from this proposed reform are to shift from automatic to discretionary LWOP sentencing for 19-20-year-olds, but with expanded procedural tools for prosecutors to pursue it.

Whether this decreases or increases the number of youth serving LWOP depends on prosecutorial discretion, county policies, and judicial interpretations. While it opens the door to more individualized sentencing, it also creates a legal infrastructure that could, if aggressively used, increase the total number of youth serving life without parole. These bills have been assigned to the House Judiciary Committee, where we look forward to learning more amid testimony and committee hearings.

Voices of Justice Fellow Kicks Off 'Know Your Rights' Event

Earlier this month, one of our *Voices of Justice* youth fellows, De'Ronnie Sparks, held a 'Know Your Rights' event, inspired by his community advocacy project. The event brought together community members and justice advocates alike for an impactful discussion about the power of young people knowing their rights when confronted by the justice system. Young people and parents were able to ask questions and learn about a multitude of legal options available if they are questioned or arrested, and even during an interrogation. These skills help equip young people with the tools they need when faced with the legal system.

We would like to thank everyone who came out to support this event, including our friends at [Community Alliance for the People](#) (CAP) in Saginaw, and the folks from the [ACLU of Michigan](#), [Juvenile Law Center](#), and [Michigan Alliance for Families](#) with their help gathering this crucial information.



Meet Our Summer Intern, Shannon!

We are excited to introduce our summer intern, Shannon Gielow! Shannon is a third-year student pursuing a dual Master's degree in Public Policy and Social Work at the University of Michigan. Her passion for juvenile justice policy reform developed through her experience as a youth advocate and undergraduate teaching assistant at Michigan State University. Shannon is currently a research assistant for the Carceral State Project, where she focuses on the historical roots of juvenile justice and synthesize findings into written documents.

Outside of school and work, Shannon enjoys exploring the outdoors and staying active with her furry friends, as well as spending time with friends, family, and her partner, Erick. Shannon is committed to making a positive difference in the lives of people involved in the justice system and is eager to contribute to this important work! Welcome to the team, Shannon!



Reimagining Justice: Centering Girls in the JJ System

In our latest episode of *The Table*, Macayla and Katie talk about the unique challenges facing girls and young women in the juvenile justice system—and how we can better support them.

Dr. Jodi Peterson, professor at Michigan State University and head of Peterson Research Consultants, joins us to discuss the effects of trauma, abuse, gender bias, and systemic bias on justice-impacted girls, especially girls of color and LGBTQ+ youth.

Content Warning: This episode contains discussions of topics that could be triggering to some. Listener discretion is advised.

Listen today at www.miyouthjustice.org/thetable or wherever you find your podcasts!

Ep 5 - Girls in the JJ System (with Dr. Jodi Peterson!)



30:10

Farewell to MCYJ Communications Coordinator, Macayla

We would like to wish a bittersweet farewell to our wonderful Communications Coordinator, Macayla Jones. Since joining MCYJ in May of 2022, Macayla has quickly become a valuable and integral member of our team. Her communications expertise and strategic mindset were instrumental in helping us educate and engage a diverse audience about transformative juvenile justice-related policy, events, and initiatives.

Macayla will be taking the next step in her career as a Marketing and Communications Specialist at the University of Michigan, where she'll support student well-being through her work with the University Health and Counseling department.

We will miss her dearly, and wish her all the best in this exciting new chapter!



Justice-Related Job Opportunity!

[The Prison Creative Arts Project](#) (PCAP) brings those impacted by the justice system together with the University of Michigan community for artistic collaboration, mutual learning, and growth. PCAP programs include undergraduate courses, creative arts workshops inside prisons, exhibitions, publications, and events that reach thousands of individuals each year. PCAP is seeking a criminal legal system-impacted creative to be a Resident Curator for the *30th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons*, the largest curated exhibition of work by incarcerated artists in the world. This residency runs from July 1, 2025, to July 31, 2026, and provides a stipend of \$12,000 plus travel expenses.

The Resident Curator will play a vital role in curating and designing the exhibition, working alongside PCAP staff, faculty, students, and community members. Responsibilities include selecting artwork from Michigan correctional facilities, participating in exhibition design, and creating a new artistic work that engages with the exhibition's themes. **Applications are due by June 15th, 2025** and can be submitted [at this link](#).

Youth Justice in the News

- [Trump cuts hit Michigan violence prevention programs: 'This will cost lives'](#)
- [Justice Department cuts to public safety grants leave police and nonprofits scrambling](#)
- [Evidence for a Purpose: A Research Agenda to Guide Policy Change in Juvenile Justice Education](#)

Upcoming Events

Children's Advocacy Centers of Michigan

2025 Justice for Children Conference

July 23rd-24th, 2025. Motorcity Casino Hotel, 2901 Grand River Ave,
Detroit, MI 48201. Learn more [here](#).

Dispute Resolution Center

2025 Michigan Restorative Justice Summit

October 30th-31st, 2025. Eastern Michigan University, Student Center, 900 Oakwood St.,
Ypsilanti, MI 48197. Learn more [here](#).

Our Vision: a fair and effective justice system for Michigan's children, youth and young adults.

Our Mission: we work to advance equitable youth justice policies and practices that protect young people and help them achieve their full potential.

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