

## Michigan Businesses Support Ending Juvenile Life Without Parole

As business leaders, we believe no child should be sentenced to die in prison. We support the bipartisan bill package, SB 119-123 and HB 5941-5944, which will end juvenile life without parole in Michigan.

We believe that people can change. We believe that children, the most vulnerable subset of our population, are particularly worthy of redemption.

Empirical research has proven that holding children to the same standards as adults is unreasonable and unfair. Adolescent brains don't fully develop until their mid-to-late twenties. This ongoing cognitive development gives children a capacity for change and growth far greater than that of most adults. Conversely, youth are less capable of long-term planning, emotional regulation, impulse control, and evaluating risks and rewards. The majority of our laws reflect adolescents' diminished decision-making capacity. However our sentencing uniquely treats them as adults. We believe children are more than their worst mistakes and should be held accountable in age-appropriate ways.

The United States is the only known country in the world that sentences children to die in prison, by imposing life without parole sentences on people under the age of 18. Here at home, the Supreme Court has repeatedly found these sentences to violate the 8th Amendment's protections against cruel and unusual punishment.

Businesses across the country are increasingly making commitments to address racial inequality. Nowhere are these inequalities more evident than in our justice system, and particularly in the sentencing of our youth. In Michigan, Black men make up less than 15 percent of our overall population, but constitute 74 percent of incarcerated individuals serving life sentences for crimes committed as children.

As business leaders, we know that allowing individuals the opportunity to rejoin society and become productive members of their communities is good for the economy – especially as we continue to face an unprecedented labor shortage across the state. Now more than ever it is critical that we allow individuals to rebuild their lives, rejoin society, and reinvigorate our economy.

Juvenile life without parole sentencing flies in the face of everything we know about compassion, science and justice. We call on lawmakers to pass SB 119-123 (and HB 5941-5944), and end it once and for all.

