

## Facts about Youth Behind Bars

In the mid-1990s, Michigan became part of a national trend to “get tough on youth crime.” Although crime rates were steadily declining, the state passed a series of harsh laws that funneled thousands of youth under 18 into the adult criminal justice system.

### **Michigan is one of only states that automatically prosecute 17-year-olds as adults.**

- Between 2003-2013, 20,291 youth were convicted as adults and placed on adult probation, sent to jail, or imprisoned for a crime they committed before turning 18. Of this population, 95% were 17 at the time of the offense.
- Nearly 60% of 17-year-olds were charged with non-violent offenses that did not include a weapon.
- 58% of those entering the system at age 17 had no prior juvenile record.

### **Michigan can prosecute, convict and sentence a youth of any age as an adult.**

- Over 75 children under the age of 14 have been convicted as adults since 1996.
- For certain offenses, 14, 15 and 16-year-old children can be automatically prosecuted as an adult without any judicial oversight.
- Most youth never go to trial. Among 17-year olds, 86% accepted a plea agreement; among youth 16 and younger, 73% accepted a plea agreement.
- Once convicted, youth must serve 100% of their minimum sentence. There are 363 people serving a life sentence without parole for a crime committed before turning 18 – second highest in the nation.

### **Youth of color are disproportionately convicted as adults in Michigan.**

- 53% of youth entering MDOC jurisdiction at age 17 were youth of color, even though youth of color only make up 23% of the population statewide.
- 59% of youth 16 or under were Black or African American, even though Black youth only make up 18% of the population statewide.

### **Girls in the adult system do not receive adequate treatment.**

- Between 2003-2013, over 2,000 girls have been convicted as adults. 86% of them were 17 years old at the time of the offense.
- 58% of girls were charged with non-violent offenses and 70% had no prior juvenile record.
- Prior to incarceration, 45% of girls had known drug abuse; 26% had known alcohol abuse; 31% had received mental health treatment.
- 13% of girls had at least one dependent.

### **Youth under age 18 often spend time in jail.**

- From 2003-2013 10,531 youth – over half of the entire youth population - received jail as part of their sentence.
- On average, a youth served 145 days in jail as part of a sentence and an average of 35 days awaiting a hearing.

### **Adult probation and prisons are ill-equipped to address the unique needs of youth.**

- Youth in adult prison are more disruptive than either adults in prison or youth in juvenile facilities, which often leads to misconducts and segregation.
- Young people are at the greatest risk of violence and victimization in prison.
- 22% of 17-year olds and 30% of youth 16 and younger had received mental health treatment prior to entering prison.
- 60% of youth had known drug abuse and 25% had known alcohol abuse prior to entering prison.

### **Youth in prison are among the most vulnerable and marginalized population.**

- Prior to entering prison, 78% had a friend who was killed; 48% had a family member who was killed.
- 81% had a parent with substance abuse issues.
- 44% spent time in foster care and were placed out of home an average of 11 times.
- 45% had a father in prison; 25% had a mother in prison; 19% had a sibling in prison.

### **Most 17-year-olds in adult corrections are behind in school.**

- 82% of youth entering prison had no high school diploma or GED.
- Among 17-year-olds in prison, 32% entered with only a 10th grade education, 20% had a 9th grade education, and 10% had an 8th grade education or lower.
- Youth only receive about 8 hours a week of education in Michigan prison.

### **Michigan is spending millions of dollars to incarcerate youth.**

- By the end of 2013, there were 5,617 people under MDOC jurisdiction that entered as 17-year-olds (probation, prison, or parole). Of that population, 55% were in prison.
- Nearly 25% of those currently in the system received sentences with a maximum term of 15 years or more, and 16% have sentences with a maximum term of 20 years or more. At a minimum, 17-year-olds serving a 20-year sentence cost the state \$2.1 billion.
- An adult conviction creates lifelong barriers to housing, employment and education. A young person convicted as an adult can expect a lifetime earning loss of 40%, translating into loss of state tax revenue.

*Source:* MCCD, Youth Behind Bars: Examining the Impact of Prosecuting and Incarcerating Kids in Michigan's Criminal Justice System, May 2014.

