

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 June 2016 Training Event
Raise the Age
June 10, 2016
Presented by: Kristen Staley, JD

This session was highlighted by a 30-minute video, “Fault Lines: Forgotten Youth”, which provided an in-depth look at the many dangers that arise from sentencing youth as adults in Michigan. Discussion to explore solutions to stopping the practice of treating youths in the adult criminal justice system followed.

Lawmakers are giving attention to “raise the age” Legislation, bills introduced that would prevent youth age 17 and younger from being treated as adults by the legal system. Ms. Staley stated that those bills are starting to advance in the legislative process because there is some recognition that the “tough on crime” laws from the nineties are not effective.

Questions and issues remain relative to raising the age. There is litigation ongoing between the adult prison system and 17-year-old and younger plaintiffs that allege they were raped in prison. Some policy makers and lawmakers have opined that separating youth from adults in prison settings is adequate, but advocates of raise the age do not believe that is enough to provide these young people with both the safety and treatment that can better be provided in a juvenile setting. Advocates also point out that adult prisons and jails have a “one size fits all” approach to rehabilitation, while juvenile settings are much more eclectic and can provide treatment responses that are tailored to the individual’s treatment and rehabilitation needs.

There are also questions of funding. For example, if or when some type of raise the age law is passed, will funding follow the juveniles from their adult custody setting back to the juvenile setting? Related, it is unknown, especially following the closure of W.J. Maxey Boys Training School, if there will be enough beds to accommodate the additional juveniles that return to and/or are placed in juvenile settings. One possible offset to that issue is the fact that more youth are not being placed in residential settings but instead are being placed on probation and/or in day treatment settings.