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Opinion | Michigan must prioritize investment in safety, prosperity, equity

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 [Chuck Warpehoski](#)


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When Governor Whitmer announced her budget recommendations for 2024-2025, it was with wind in her sails on public safety. The COVID crime spike has come down statewide, and [Detroit had its lowest crime rate since 1966](#).

While many factors drive this improvement in public safety, smart budget investments are paramount to preventing violence, including improved programs that help people with criminal records succeed in the workforce. As the Legislature gets to work on the 2024-2025 state budget, we call on them to prioritize [investing in a safer Michigan](#) by funding programs that improve safety, expand prosperity, and advance equity.



Chuck Warpehoski is the Program Director Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration.

Prevent violence by investing in community

Lansing has given a lot of attention to recruiting police to respond after a crime takes place, but often police lack the trust, relationships, and skills to prevent violence in the first place. Community Violence Intervention programs recruit trusted messengers to build rapport with people at risk of committing violence and help prevent disputes from ending in bloodshed.

CVI is a data-driven policy with a proven track record in Michigan and across the country, contributing to recent reductions in violence. We applaud the governor's call for \$5M of one-time funding and \$500K of recurring funding, and we call on the legislature to find an enduring, long-term funding stream for CVI. Fire departments and restaurant inspectors don't worry that their funding will go to zero next year, and CVI programs need that same stability.

Fund Conviction Integrity Units

The number of exonerations from the conviction integrity units in Michigan show a key truth about the criminal legal system: sometimes even the best of us get things wrong.

The stakes are high when we're talking about the power to take away someone's freedom, especially when we remember that convicting the innocent means that the guilty party has evaded consequences. That's why it's vital to have checks and balances in place in the form of conviction integrity units to investigate innocence claims.

Elected prosecutors have the power and discretion to act in the interest of justice when there is no legal recourse through the courts. Without a CIU, innocent people, who have no, or little chance of success through the courts, have the opportunity for relief from their wrongful conviction. The 2024-2025 budget must provide funding to establish or expand county-level conviction integrity units.

Create Juvenile Defense Standards

The bipartisan Michigan Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform unanimously recommended to "Expand the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission to include development, oversight, and compliance with youth defense standards in local county defense systems." While legislation to enact this recommendation is pending in the legislature, we encourage lawmakers to allocate the funding now to conduct the research, data analysis, and compliance framework to develop these youth defense standards.

Prepare people who are incarcerated for successful return to society

Most people sentenced to prison will return to their communities after serving their sentence. Most formerly incarcerated individuals will overcome the many barriers they face upon reentry and stay out of trouble. It is in everybody's interest to tilt the scales in support of successful reentry, beginning while people are still in prison.

We applaud the Governor's proposed educational investment at Thumb Correctional Facility. We must improve access to health care for Michigan's incarcerated population by getting rid of costly copays. We also must ensure that money spent in the prison system is spent appropriately, by improving record keeping and increasing transparency.

When it comes to punitive practices like solitary confinement and taking away family visits, both of which increase trauma and impede successful reentry, they should be eliminated.

And lastly, we must improve upon Michigan's successful Clean Slate law by allocating funding to establish a Clean Slate portal so that formerly incarcerated individuals can check their status.

Last year's decrease in violence is not an anomaly. It is the result of thoughtful, long-term solutions implemented at the community level that do not rely on mass incarceration or over-policing.

These common-sense budget recommendations provide a roadmap for the Legislature to keep Michigan communities safe, while providing second chances for those formerly incarcerated. Our lawmakers need to hear from us that we support these policies as well as ensuring that they are adequately funded in the upcoming budget, the safety of our communities depends on. Show your support by taking action at <https://bit.ly/mibudget2024>.

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