



# Investing in a Safer Michigan

## FY2026 Michigan Budget Recommendations to Invest in Crime Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Reentry

To: Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks, Speaker of the House Matt Hall, House and Senate Appropriations Committees

From: Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration (MI-CEMI), Safe & Just Michigan, Organization of Exonerees, Citizens for Prison Reform, Progress Michigan, FORCE Detroit, Michigan League for Public Policy, Nation Outside

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With Michigan seeing [record low rates of violent crime](#) and [low rates of recidivism](#), the FY2026 budget is an opportunity to double down on the programs that prevent violence, support rehabilitation, and promote successful reintegration of people as they exit the criminal legal system.

As the legislature finalized the FY2026 budget, we call on lawmakers to:

- **Invest in violence prevention** by funding the creation of the juvenile defense standards proposed in HB 4070, funding the bipartisan sentencing commission, and ensuring continuation of the Community Violence Intervention grants that have helped bring Michigan's violent crime rates to historic lows.
- **Invest in rehabilitation** by removing counterproductive medical copays, expanding educational opportunities in prisons, and ensuring access to quality appellate defense.
- **Invest in reentry.** Supporting people as they transition from prison is the best way to prevent recidivism. Michigan can strengthen the reentry process by investing in reentry transitional healthcare and continuing to fund peer reentry navigators.

These investments **improve public safety, reduce long-term prison costs, and improve economic stability.** Here is additional detail about the proposals:

## 1. Invest in Violence Prevention

Early intervention to prevent violence and incarceration is best as it prevents harm in our communities and avoids the long-term costs of incarceration.

### 1A: Fund Development of Juvenile Defense Standards

The bipartisan [Michigan Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform](#) unanimously recommended to “Expand the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) to include development, oversight, and compliance with youth defense standards in local county defense systems.” Bipartisan legislation to enact this recommendation (HB 4070 and SB 081) is moving through the legislature now. **We encourage the legislature to fund the staffing necessary to develop these youth defense standards in the FY2026 budget.**

Competent youth defense is both a constitutional obligation and an investment in helping kids succeed. As the National Juvenile Defender Center noted in their 2020 report, [Overdue for Justice: an Assessment of Access to and Quality of Juvenile Defense Counsel in Michigan](#), “The absence of state funding for juvenile defense has perpetuated local juvenile defense systems in which attorneys frequently lack the training, resources, and time necessary to provide the quality of defense services youth deserve. *As a result, young people’s constitutional rights are often inadequately protected, their voices are not heard, and they may miss opportunities to be connected to successful pathways forward.* (emphasis added)”

### 1B: Invest in the Bipartisan Sentencing Commission

As [Governor Rick Snyder](#) observed, “keeping an individual in prison longer than is necessary wastes taxpayer dollars that could be better spent preventing crimes from happening in the first place.”

Unfortunately, Michigan’s current sentencing system has not been subject to oversight since its creation in 1998, and it has been amended numerous times since then. During this time, it has produced progressively longer sentences, as well as geographic and racial sentencing disparities. These trends and outcomes warrant further study and an assessment from not only a sentencing policy standpoint, but also from a public safety and cost perspective.

The bipartisan sentencing commission established last year creates a mechanism for rigorous review of Michigan’s sentencing system that includes broad stakeholder feedback from law enforcement, crime survivors, formerly incarcerated people, the judiciary, and other key constituencies. In the FY20243 budget the legislature allocated \$1M for the commission, but

these funds were redirected to other uses. **We recommend the legislature restore these funds with an allocation of \$1M to ensure that this commission can have the staffing and data gathering resources to be effective.** With each year of prison in Michigan costing approximately \$50k, if the commission saved just 20 life years of incarceration by preventing excessive sentencing of people who have rehabilitated, it would pay for itself, and there is similar value in preventing crime if sentencing guidelines are too light.

## 1C: Sustainably Fund Direct Grants for Community-Based Violence Intervention

Community partners across Michigan have successfully brought violent crime rates down to historic lows, and Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs have been a key aspect of this accomplishment. By deploying “credible messengers” (AKA “violence interrupters”) to intervene with people at risk of committing violence, CVI efforts reduce the burden on law enforcement, reduce the cost of incarceration, and most importantly they save lives.

The Executive Recommendations call for \$75M investment in a public safety and violence prevention fund, 6.5% of which (\$4.875M) would be granted to “cities, villages, townships, tribal entities, and community organizations for the purpose of advancing solutions to community violence.” **We support maintaining this funding and strengthening the boilerplate language to ensure it is used explicitly to fund community violence intervention initiatives and strategies (violence interrupter funding, wrap around resources and strategic implementation).** We also support the restrictions on the public safety and violence prevention fund listed in Sec. 21-959 3(a) and 4(b) of the executive recommendations.

## 2. Invest in Rehabilitation

Most people who are incarcerated will be returning to the community. Therefore the wisest policy while people are incarcerated is to provide the resources necessary to remain healthy and prepare for their release through maximizing access to rehabilitative activities such as quality programming and family visits.

### 2A: Eliminate Medical Copays for Incarcerated Patients

As noted in the Governor’s Executive Budget Recommendation “Access to health care is vital for Michigan families and ensures everyone has what they need to succeed.” When a doctor’s visit costs a week’s wages, it is not accessible, but that’s what the mandatory copay for prison healthcare equates to. We recommend that Michigan build on this success by eliminating

prison medical copays, which are set by statute at \$5, and are assessed ~50,000 times annually. Prison medical copays:

- Deter people from seeking treatment.
- Build debt that incarcerated people carry with them.
- Drain the resources of the loved ones who support them.

**We recommend \$500k allocation in the FY2026 budget to eliminate prison medical care copays.**

## 2B: Expand Educational Access for Incarcerated Students

Research consistently shows that investing in education for incarcerated adults has a high return on investment and is a powerful tool to prevent recidivism. Michigan has been an early leader in taking advantage of the federal Pell Grant expansion. **We support the proposed \$750K to expand availability of postsecondary education programs to incarcerated students.**

## 2C: Invest in Quality Appellate Defense

The Governor's budget includes \$2.3M for the State Appellate Defender Office to continue the planned, phased implementation of workload standards outlined by the National Center for State Courts. SADO represents approximately 25% of people appealing criminal convictions. Their work to address wrongful convictions, sentencing errors, and to develop optimal reentry strategies for their clients ensure that constitutional protections are upheld. In 2023, SADO's work to correct sentencing errors resulted in a reduction in people's prison terms by 423 years and savings of \$19 million in Department of Corrections costs. **We recommend that the legislature maintain the proposed funding for SADO direct appeals.**

## 3. Invest in Reentry

Most people who return to community from prison do so successfully. One of the best investments Michigan can make in public safety is to ensure that people exiting prison can successfully attain employment and housing, access medical care, and build a stable life.

### 3A: Invest in Reentry Transition Healthcare

The transition from jail, youth detention, or prison back to community is complex, especially for people who have medical, mental, or behavioral health needs. The proposed pre-release

Medicaid services to incarcerated individuals will ensure individuals returning to their communities have the support to continue their medication, access treatment, and make the transition to the healthcare system. **We support the proposed \$40M for this reentry support.** Not only will it improve the wellbeing of recipients, it will also prevent unnecessary and expensive emergency room visits and inpatient hospitalizations and will help support successful transitions.

### 3B: Invest in Peer-Led Reentry

One of the most exciting areas of innovation has been the development of peer reentry navigators, such as the Nation Outside Trauma-Informed Peer-Led Reentry (TIPLR) program. **We support the allocation of \$2.5 million for TIPLR, which includes the cost of the existing program and an expansion into rural Michigan, where the need for reentry support is particularly critical.** People reentering from prison report that the support of formerly incarcerated individuals who have successfully navigated reentry is a significant contributor to their success. Peer Navigators are distinct from the proposed peer recovery coaches for individuals with substance use disorder, focusing instead on the holistic needs of justice-impacted individuals and helping to reduce recidivism while building stronger communities and economies.

## 4. Boilerplate Policy Recommendations

The budget process is an opportunity to address data gathering and procedural issues within the State of Michigan.

### 4A: Maintain the Requirement to Reduce Fees for MDOC Contract Negotiation

Last year's budget included a requirement that "the department [of corrections] must pursue all opportunities to reduce costs for prisoners and prisoners' families for financial deposit fees and commissary fees when the department negotiates or renews any contract to provide these services." **We ask that the legislature renew this negotiation requirement in the FY2026 budget.**

## 4B: Improve Transparency on the Use of Segregation (Solitary Confinement)

We recommend expanding segregation reporting to reduce deaths in custody, save the state money long-term, and reduce the trauma to staff and the population. Segregation includes all circumstances in which a person is held in-cell 22 or more hours a day. Segregation reporting should be:

- **Comprehensive:** All conditions that result in someone being held in cell for 22 or more hours per day, including but not limited to Administrative Segregation, Notice of Intent Status, or Security Threat Group. It should also include related restrictions such as Loss of Privileges (LOP), telephone, food, water restriction, or programming restrictions.
- **Disaggregated:** Report the use of segregation by facility and by demographic data such as age, race, gender, any disability, mental illness, or medical condition.
- **Cumulative:** include the total number of days that anyone is placed in segregation.
- **Regular:** Monthly to rapidly incidents of excessive segregation.

## 4C: Improve Transparency and Accountability Regarding for Family Loss of Visits

Maintaining family contact while incarcerated [promotes successful reentry, helps reduce misconduct, while improving mental health](#) and as reiterated in the [MDOC Family Reunification Policy](#), Currently though, under [Legislative Administrative Rule 791.5514](#) an incarcerated person and their loved ones can lose their visits for conduct unrelated to visits; for example, having two tickets for substance use while incarcerated. The loss of visits for unrelated behavior is especially troublesome given the evidence that [most drugs in prisons are brought in by staff, not visitors](#). **We request a Visitor Restriction Report annually to include the comprehensive data on visitation rights lost, restored, and applied to be restored.**

## 4D: Publicly Post MDOC Inspections of County Jails and Lockups

Under [state law](#), the Michigan Department of Corrections “to obtain facts concerning the proper management of the jails and lockups and their usefulness.” This inspection process is important to promote the humane treatment of people held in county jails, but the results of the inspections are not currently made public. **We support the addition of boilerplate language requiring that MDOC inspections of county jails under MCL 791.262 be posted to the MDOC website within 30 days of completion and that revised audit reports shall be made public once corrective action is completed.**