

Safe & Just Michigan SPRING UPDATE

Safe & Just
Michigan

April
2025

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Dena Anderson (left)
and former SJM
Grants Manager
Ashley Bellant at a
2023 event in Ingham
County.

Fond farewell to our friend Dena

Dena Anderson has been a friend, supporter and dedicated team member of Safe & Just Michigan almost from the day it was founded as CAPPS in 2000. Many readers of our hardcopy newsletter have interacted with her in her role as member services coordinator in recent years.

As of Dec. 31, 2024, Dena is no longer with the organization. We know that many of you turned to

Dena for help and information, and Safe & Just Michigan is still here for you.

Director of Outreach and Community Partnerships **Ken Nixon** and Community Engagement Specialist **Ronnie Waters** are taking over her role of communication with our incarcerated members. You can direct JPay communications to them at info@safeandjustmi.org

New year off to quiet start

Normally, we would be sending you a 12-page newsletter to read around this time of year. Obviously, you're holding a much shorter newsletter in your hands, and we'd like to explain.

This year marks the start of a new legislative session at the state Capitol. After new state Representatives are sworn in, new committee assignments were made. Among them were the House Judiciary Committee, which considers most of the bills we follow. (See below left for a listing of committee members.)

A flurry of activity followed. Gov. **Gretchen Whitmer** gave her annual State of the State Address, but it didn't have much to say about corrections or public safety. Neither did her budget proposal the following week.

The Senate and House have been slow to introduce bills. There have been few committee hearings. Lansing is in a holding pattern.

We anticipate bills we support to be introduced soon. We'll send a longer newsletter when we can tell you more.



SJM Director of Outreach and Community Partnerships **Ken Nixon**, left, Berrien County Commissioner **Chokwe Pitchford**, center, and state Rep. **Joey Andrews** (D-Benton Harbor) at the State of the State Address

Judiciary Committee names members

The House Judiciary Committee has seated its members for the 2025-26 Legislative session:

Chair: Rep. **Sarah Lightner** (R-Springport)

Majority Vice Chair: Rep. **Brian BeGole** (R-Antrim Township)

Minority Vice Chair: Rep. **Tyrone Carter** (D-Detroit)

Members: Reps. **Douglas Wozniak** (R-Shelby Township), **Mike Harris** (R-Waterford), **Jay DeBoyer** (R-Clay Township), **Gina Johnsen** (R-Lake Odessa), **Bill Schuette** (R-Midland), **Kara Hope** (D-Holt), **Kelly Breen** (D-Novi), **Helena Scott** (D-Detroit)

The Senate Civil Rights, Judiciary & Public Safety Committee remains unchanged.



Lame Duck fallout: Gov signs 1 plan, vetoes other

Lame Duck proved to be a chaotic time, thanks to backroom disagreements among politicians. Days of potential work were lost when some legislators opted to stay home instead of coming into the Capitol. As a result, a lot of legislation that might have passed stalled.

Despite her veto, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer called providing people leaving prison with vital documents "an important criminal justice reform issue."

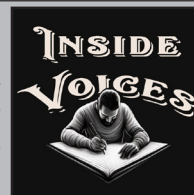
Even so, two of the legislative packages we supported did cross the finish line. Bills that would create a sentencing commission to establish more uniform sentencing practices and a plan to provide vital documents like a state identification card to people leaving prison wrapped up all legislative work by the end of the session.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed the sentencing commission bill into law. However, she vetoed vital documents. She said her veto was "a necessary consequence of the Legislature's failure to reconcile the text of these bills with existing law," and said she hoped to work with the Legislature to pass this "important criminal justice reform issue."

Inside Voices returns next issue

We know many of you enjoy reading and contributing to the Inside Voices column. Unfortunately, the shortened newsletter this time doesn't allow for the space this column deserves. We'd have to cut too much from the letters to make them fit. Instead, we'll wait for the next issue, so we can run more. If you or

someone you know wants to correspond with us via JPAY, please let us know by contacting us at info@safeandjustmi.org or writing to Inside Voices, c/o Safe & Just Michigan, 119 Pere Marquette Drive Suite 2A, Lansing MI 48912.



A better future begins at home

commentary by Executive Director John S. Cooper

Amidst the chaos engulfing the unrelenting national news cycle, it can be easy to forget there are things we can do close to home to improve lives. Many of the issues where we can make the greatest impact involve state and local politics and policy.

Reforming our criminal justice system is one of those issues. About 90 percent of the people impacted by the criminal justice system nationally are impacted by state and local systems. Consider:

- There are roughly 2.8 million people with criminal records in Michigan, many with unpaid criminal justice debt.
- About 100,000 people each year go to jail in Michigan.

- There are about 33,000 people in prison in Michigan.

In each case, there are achievable, evidence-based policy changes our Legislature and Governor can make to reduce the number of people impacted by these systems. We can reduce harms that arise out of justice involvement for directly impacted people, their loved ones, and their communities.

Not all of the changes we want to see are reachable today. These are not easy issues. But we are working right now to reach them. Plus, we never reach hard goals by waiting; we need to start and keep building now, so that some day, those goals are within reach.

Coming soon: fines & fees, habitual sentencing, report on driver's licenses

We expect the pace to pick up as we get further into 2025.

We're interested in taking on habitual sentencing in Michigan. This optional sentencing enhancement is applied unevenly across the state and can double sentence lengths in a place that already has some of the longest prison sentences in the nation.

We'll continue our work to reduce the financial burden the criminal legal system places on families through fines and fees.



The cover of our upcoming report on driver's license restorations.

We announced that work last year with the Fines & Fees Justice Center.

And next month we anticipate releasing a report on driver's license restoration in Michigan, along with our plans to help people restore their driving privileges.