

August 27, 2013

Support of Bills 4806-4809

Justice for families and victims is paramount in any discussion regarding the punishment of crime. Some are opposed to bills 4806-4809 based solely on that reason, and I would tend to come to this conclusion as well; however after looking further into the facts I have concluded that this change is essential for our penal system. I believe strongly that individuals guilty of crime should meet with penalties commensurate with that crime. The current structure of the law does not allow for judicial discretion, places blanket rules over complex cases, disproportionately affects juvenile offenders, and costs tax payers unnecessarily.

The structure of our government allows for checks and balances and the law as it stands takes away the ability for our judicial system to apply the law based on the circumstances of the case. A juvenile offender who was driving a vehicle outside of the crime is treated the same as the person pulling the trigger. The victim's family has no say. The power of the judge to adjust sentencing or to administer parole based on behavior, demonstrated rehabilitation, age, time in prison or other factors is stripped away due to current stringent law.

As a mother of teenage sons I know that even though they may at times seem like adults and certainly think they are adults their thoughts and actions are yet to be tried and tested. Peer pressure and poor choices have yet to face consequences. I believe juvenile offenders should face severe punishment for crimes as not only a consequence but as a deterrent to others faced with similar choices. The legal system should however have the ability to discern between adult serial offenders and juveniles who have the ability to forge a different future.

Housing criminals is a substantial expenditure for our state. In 2010 it cost Michigan taxpayers 1.3 billion dollars to incarcerate a daily average population of 45,096 inmates (1). That is a cost of 28,117 per year per prisoner (1). A year at the University of Michigan with housing is a few thousand less. (2) I'm not proposing that this is a simple switch of making prisoners students, but merely desiring us all to consider the use of our resources. Let's get behind bill 4806-4809 so our Judges again have the ability to appropriately apply sentencing. It's the fair and prudent action.

Tricia M. Fee

1: <http://www.vera.org/files/price-of-prisons-michigan-fact-sheet.pdf>

2: <http://www.finaid.umich.edu/TopNav/AboutUMFinancialAid/CostofAttendance.asp>