

Michigan Legislature
Michigan State Capitol
100 N. Capitol Ave
Lansing, MI 48933

September 8, 2020

Dear members of the Michigan Legislature,

As pastors and leaders of faith-based organizations that minister and provide services in Michigan, we join together to write you in support of criminal justice reform and restoration of citizens who are detained in jail. Because the good news of Jesus Christ calls the Church to advocate for biblical truth and care for the vulnerable, we, His followers, call for a criminal justice system that is fair and redemptive for our fellow neighbors who are incarcerated and restores people who are reentering society. As Christians, we believe every human being is created in the image of God and should be treated accordingly.

When a person commits criminal acts, it damages our communities and requires proportional accountability measures. However, it is equally important to avoid overreliance on incarceration where it isn't required to serve public safety goals. Even a short stay in a jail or suspending a driver's license can inhibit access to jobs, schools, childcare, and houses of worship, and should be used sparingly.

We commend the efforts of the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration for their Report and Recommendations, which include: a speedy determination if pretrial incarceration is appropriate; reduces fines and fees from being financial obstacles to avoiding incarceration; driver's license suspension for non-driving offenses should be avoided when possible; and law enforcement should be properly equipped and trained to handle the mental health concerns they encounter.

As our churches and organizations work to reach Michigan communities with a message of hope and redemption, we ask you to consider the following guiding biblical principles as you work to reform the criminal justice system:

- Each human being, including those who commit crime and the victims of crime, is a person made in God's own image, with a life worthy of respect, protection and care;
- Accountability for crime should be community-based and local where possible, recognizing that cultivation of the seedbeds of virtue like families and churches pays dividends in reducing crime;
- Appropriate avenues should be provided for personal transformation and a second chance;
- Punishment should be proportional to the act committed, advancing public safety, fostering accountability, and giving opportunities to make amends;
- Rehabilitation of those formerly incarcerated should include, where not prohibited by public safety concerns, restoration of the rights and privileges previously lost in order to foster their ability to become productive citizens and taxpayers in society.

As we work to preach the good news of the gospel, that redemption through Christ is available to everyone and that His sacrifice covers our sin, we ask that you take hold of these important values and usher in a new season of criminal justice in Michigan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Craig DeRoche
Emeritus Member, Faith & Justice Fellowship
Former Speaker of the House
State of Michigan

Lisa Blystra
President, CEO
Crossroads Prison Ministries
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Rev. Bruce Vaandrager
Executive Director
Hope Network Pastoral Services
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Rev. Dr. Kit Carlson
Rector, All Saints Episcopal Church
East Lansing, Michigan

C. Allen Kannapell
Pastor
His Church Anglican
Livonia, Michigan

Kimberly Woodson
Founding of Redeeming Kimberly

Rev. Henry J. Hales - Pastor
St. John Lutheran Church, Palms
Trinity Lutheran Church, Forestville

Rev. Fr. David Simmons
Pastor of Crossroads Anglican
Brighton, Michigan

Rev. Dr. Paul H. Thwaite
Pastor, Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian
Chaplain, West Bloomfield / Orchard Lake, MI Police Departments

Pastor Manisha Dostert
Senior Associate Rector
Christ Church Cranbrook
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan



REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON

Micah J. Watson
Paul B. Henry Professor of Christianity and Politics
Director, Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics
Politics, Philosophy, & Economics
Calvin University

Rev. Joshua Speyers
Abundant Mercy Church
Detroit, Michigan

Rev. Bertram B. Lewis
St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Detroit, Michigan