Safe & Just Michigan

Oct. 31, 2018

Update from Safe & Just Michigan

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Safe & Just Michigan thanks everyone who made our 2018 Annual Membership Meeting and dinner a success, from our wonderful guest speakers to William G. Milliken Award recipient Rep. **David Pagel** (pictured to the far right), to all of you who were able to join us. If you weren't able to attend, look below to read more about what was learned that night. This update also has information about the upcoming Election Day, the "lame duck" legislative session that will take place immediately following the election and other events and activities that are important to people who care about criminal justice reform in Michigan.

Annual Meeting Review:

Shared values key to moving hearts & minds

Safe & Just Michigan's 2018 Annual Membership Meeting on Oct. 18 focused on "Moving hearts and minds toward reform" and featured a conversation between **Ellen Buchman**, vice president of communications lab The Opportunity Agenda in New York, and **Leon El-Alamin**, founder and executive director of the MADE Institute in Flint.

The talk illustrated The Opportunity Agenda's Values-Problem-Solution-Action (VPSA) method and gave practical pointers to people who want to convince others to join the cause of criminal justice reform. After listening to El-Alamin's share his own life story — which included growing up in Flint, following others into the drug trade, a stay in prison and then a determination to undo the damage he had caused in his own community — Buchman led the audience through an exercise where they used his story to build a narrative based on the VSPA model.

Buchman asked the audience to share what values they heard in El-Alamin's story, and they mentioned concepts such as redemption, accountability and forgiveness. Buchman pointed out that these are ***values*** that are broadly held by people no matter where they stand on the issue of criminal justice reform.

But, people noted, the absence of reforms such as a lack of of expungement opportunities or job opportunities makes it difficult for formerly incarcerated people to live up to the values they aspire to. Buchman said that is the ***problem*** that needs to be presented.

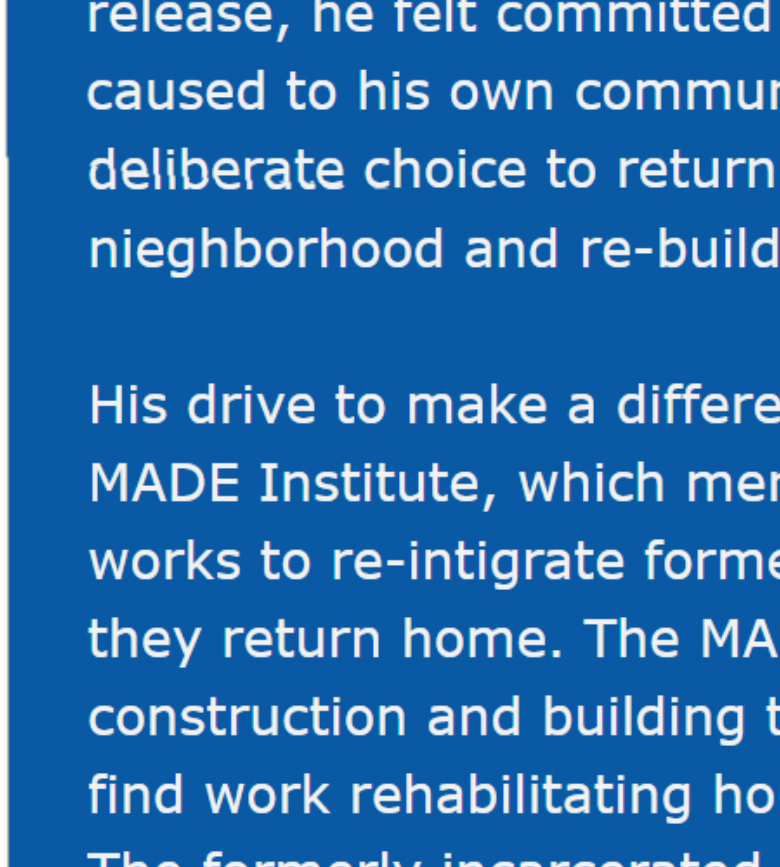
Next, the model suggests that you offer a ***solution***. For instance, there may be a legislative solution to expand expungement and ban the box, or a public awareness campaign to encourage employers to hire formerly incarcerated people and give them a chance.

Finally, ask for ***action***, whether it is calling legislators and asking for a vote, talking to business leaders and urging them to consider the benefits of hiring formerly incarcerated people or some other solution. Let people know that they are empowered to make a change for the better.

You can learn more about the VPSA method at The Opportunity Agenda's website, and read more about our Annual Membership Meeting here.

Meet Leon El-Alamin

Leon El-Alamin, the founder and executive director of the MADE Institute in Flint, was gracious enough to be one of our featured speakers at this year's Annual Membership Meeting and dinner. That evening, he generously shared his life story in order to illustrate The Opportunity Agenda's VPSA values-based communications model (see story above). Now, that participation is elevating his organization's profile as well.



El-Alamin told the audience that he grew up in Flint and followed the pattern he saw set by so many others around him as he grew up. As a young man, he became involved in the drug trade, which eventually led to his arrest and incarceration. But upon his release, he felt committed to undo the harm he had caused to his own community. He made the deliberate choice to return to his childhood nieghborhood and re-build his life there.

His drive to make a difference led him to start the MADE Institute, which mentors at-risk yououth and works to re-intigrate formerly incarcerated people as they return home. The MADE Institute teaches them construction and building trades skills and helps them find work rehabilitating houses and other structures. The formerly incarcerated people in his program not only restore buildings, but also fortify their own work skills and resumes as they rebuild their own lives.

Programs like the MADE Institute can make a huge difference to people who are struggling to restart their lives after prison, because many employers aren't willing to give them a second chance, El-Alamin said.

"A lot of what people think they know about the criminal justice system is outdated or just misguided, and that harms formerly incarcerated people who are trying so hard to turn their lives around," El-Alamin said. "Prejudice against formerly incarcerated people makes it nearly impossible for them to get a job or rent an apartment. There's dignity in being able to work and put food on the table, and when you take that away from someone, you're telling them that they'll never be forgiven or get a second chance."

El-Alamin's participation at Safe & Just Michigan's Annual Membership Meeting gained media notice for the MADE Institute, too. His speech, as well as his organization and his work, was mentioned recently by the online magazine Flintside.

"I'm grateful for the chance to get the word out about the MADE Institute and the work that we're doing, as well as the hard work that our youth and returning citizens are doing, too," El-Alamin said. "My hope is that as more people get to know us, know who we are and how we're helping our community, more people will be willing to open their hearts and give people a second chance as they work to hold themselves accountable."

Visit the MADE Institute's website here.

Get ready for 'lame duck'

The calendar on the wall may say that there are still two months to go before 2018 comes to an end, but Michigan's Legislature runs on a different kind of schedule. And according to the Capitol's timetable, time is quickly running out on the 2017-18 legislative session.

The 2018 general election will take place on Tuesday, Nov. 6. Later that week, the newly elected legislators in the House and Senate will come to Lansing to select their leadership for the 2019-2020 legislative session. The Legislature then takes a two week break for Veteran's Day and Thanksgiving.

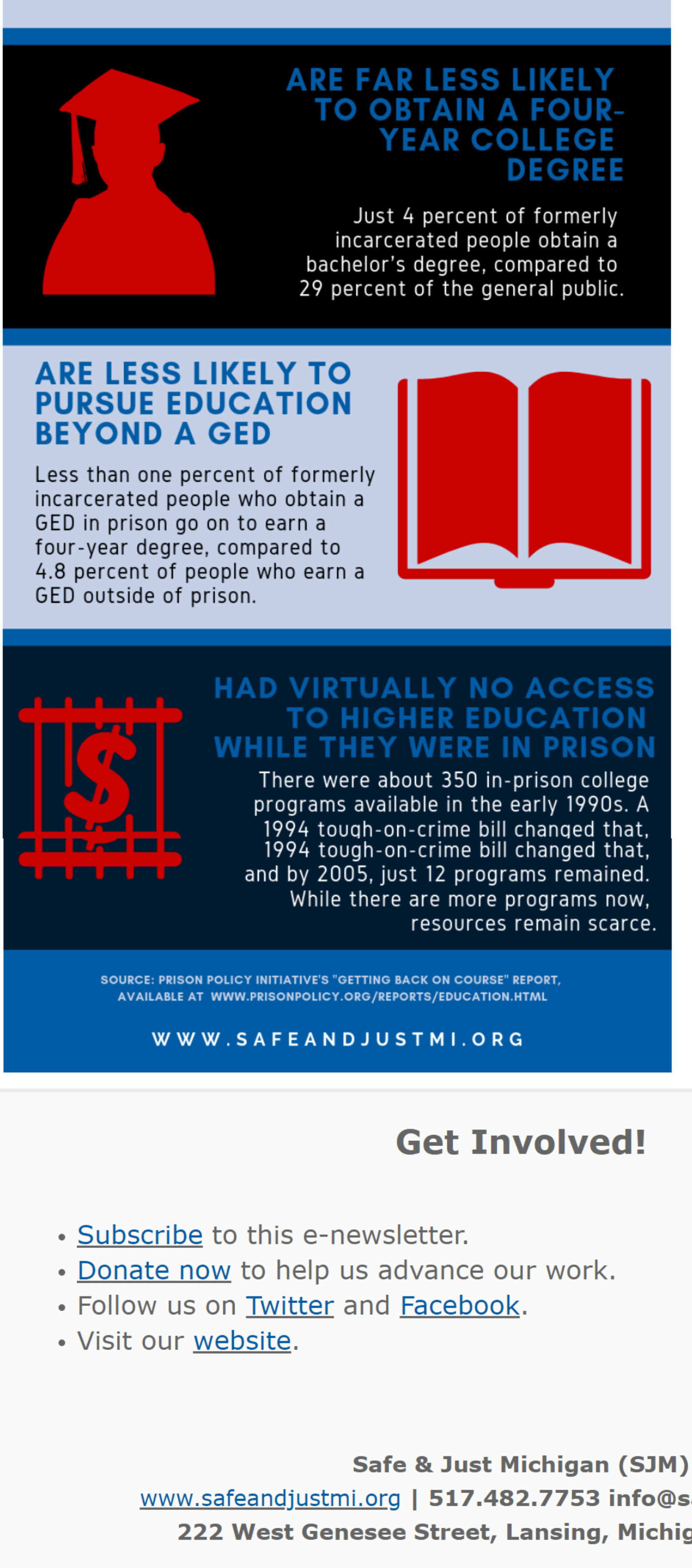
When the Michigan House of Representatives and Michigan Senate returns to session on Nov. 27, things will get interesting.

The period of time between Thanksgiving and Christmas at the end of a two-year legislative session is commonly called "lame duck," and it's a time when lawmakers hurry to pursuade other legislators and cut deals to get bills passed into law. There is a lot of pressure to get things done because if a bill doesn't make it through the legislative process and get signed by the governor by the end of the year, it dies — no matter how much hard work it's taken to get the bill to that point. The only way forward will be to re-introduce the bill anew in the next legislative session.

Here's a quick roundup of some of the topics we believe may come up during the lame duck session this year:

- **Medical parole** (House Bills 4101-2 and 5245): Would allow for medically frail incarcerated people to be released to the community for treatment. These bills made it through the House but have stalled in the Senate, which significantly watered down the impact of the House version of the bills in committee.
- **Raise the age** (see outline of bills and bill numbers here): Would end Michigan's status as one of just four states that treats 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system. The sticking point in passing these bills is a funding mechanism that will keep Michigan counties from bearing the costs associated with transfering 17-year-olds from the adult to the juvenile justice system. These bills are currently in the House Justice Committee.
- **Job opportunity bills** (HBs 6110-13 & 6381; 5450-52): The first set of bills removes the "good moral character" requirement from occupational licensing that has prevented many formerly incarcerated people from obtaining necessary professional licenses they need to get good-paying jobs. The second set of bills lowers barriers formerly incarcerated people face in working in the health care jobs. Status - first set is awaiting action in the Senate; second set is before the House Law and Justice Committee.
- **Expungement reform** (HB 4798 & 4835): Would give more people a chance to have their criminal record expunged by widening the number of people eligible for expungement. Status - before the House Law and Justice Committee.
- **Bail reform** (HBs 6555-6563): Would reform the cash bail system to make release on a personal recognizance bond the default, unless there is a genuine public safety concern, and require courts to take a person's financial situation into consideration when setting bail, among other provisions. Status - awaiting a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee.

To read more about the coming lame duck session, please read SJM Associate Director of Policy & Research John Cooper's blog post here.



HOW INCARCERATION INTERFERES WITH GETTING AN EDUCATION

Safe & Just Michigan

According to a recent Prison Policy Initiative study, formerly incarcerated people ...

ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE NO DIPLOMA OR DEGREE

Formerly incarcerated people are twice as likely to have no high school dimploma or GED (25 percent) than people than the general public (13 percent).

ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO OBTAIN A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE

Just 4 percent of formerly incarcerated people obtain a bachelor's degree, compared to 29 percent of the general public.

ARE LESS LIKELY TO PURSUE EDUCATION BEYOND A GED

Less than one percent of formerly incarcerated people who obtain a GED in prison go on to earn a four-year degree, compared to 4.8 percent of people who earn a GED outside of prison.

HAD VIRTUALLY NO ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION WHILE THEY WERE IN PRISON

There were about 350 in-prison college programs available in the early 1990s. A 1994 tough-on-crime bill changed that, 1994 tough-on-crime bill changed that, and by 2005, just 12 programs remained. While there are more programs now, resources remain scarce.

SOURCE: PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE'S "GETTING BACK ON COURSE" REPORT, AVAILABLE AT WWW.PRISONPOLICY.ORG/REPORTS/EDUCATION.HTML

WWW.SAFEANDJUSTMI.ORG

Time to vote!

Remember! Tuesday, Nov. 6 is Election Day. Michigan allows people with criminal records who are not currently incarcerated to vote!

- People who have been incarcerated **CAN VOTE** in Michigan.
- People who are on parole or probation **CAN VOTE** in Michigan.
- People who are in jail awaiting trial **CAN VOTE** in Michigan.
- People who are in jail awaiting arraignment **CAN VOTE** in Michigan.
- People who are currently in jail or prison serving a sentence **CANNOT** vote.

To learn more about how to register to vote, where to vote and to find answers for other voting questions, visit the Secretary of State's Voter Information Center.

Safe & Just Michigan has a one-page fact sheet to help answer questions about voting rights for justice-involved people. We hope you'll find it useful and share it with others.

SJM in the news

SJM is gaining notice among Michigan reporters as a center of expertise on topics related to criminal justice.

Online magazine Bridge Michigan quoted our Associate Director of Policy and Research, **John Cooper**, about SJM's support of a cash bail reform effort introduced to the Legislature in mid-October.

"Cash bail is an outdated system that unjustly disrupts the lives of thousands of vulnerable Michiganders before they are convicted of any crime and without regard for whether they pose a risk to public safety," Cooper said. "The mere inability to pay bail causes many people to languish in county jails for weeks or even months at the cost of their jobs, vehicles, housing, credit scores and minor children. The human cost of this unnecessary incarceration is tragic but avoidable, as the federal system and the number of states that do not use cash bail have made clear."

Want to own a business?

Safe & Just Michigan partner organization RecoveryPark and ProsperUS Detroit, a program of Southwest Solutions, will offer free entrepreneurship training in Detroit for returning citizens with children starting January 2019.

The 12-session training course includes 10 hours of one-on-one business coaching designed to walk returning citizen heads-of-households through the business planning process. The program combines workshop and lectures to help participants create unique, sustainable and profitable business ideas, concluding with a business pitch competition. Entrepreneurs will leave the course with a working business plan, business and financial coaches and an understanding of microloan programs.

Participants must have been incarcerated for any period of time and be parents, caregivers or heads-of-households of families with a child under the age of 8. Participants must be able to commit to the full 12-week series, beginning with an orientation on Jan. 9, 2019, from 5:30-8:30 p.m. The program will be located either in the Poletown neighborhood (I-94 and Chene) or near Highland Park off Woodward Avenue – location to be determined (feel free to let them know if one is more convenient than another).

Space is limited, so respond quickly! Email prosperus@swsol.org for any additional details. The application deadline is December 1, 2018.

EXIT strategy

Michigan Citizens for Prison Reform will host a presentation from **Roxanna Hartline**, the director of Empowering Ex-offenders in Transition program (EXIT), at its next meeting on Saturday, Nov. 17 at 10:45 a.m. at the Calvary Lutheran Church, 6301 St. Joe Highway in Lansing, 48917.

In the EXIT program, people are released from jail to the EXIT center to gain work skills, improve academics, enhance life skills and engage positively with the community. The program has had great success rates.

CPR meetings are free, open to the public and secular.

"While We Were away"

The University of Michigan, in conjunction with the Prison Creative Arts Project, is producing a new podcast titled "While We Were Away" that is made by and for formerly incarcerated people. It follows the stories of community members who have invited us to share in their moments of joy, sorrow, and learning upon coming home. Learn more and listen here.

WHILE WE WERE AWAY

prison creative arts project

Upon further research

Many surveys, research papers and other documents have been published recently that people who follow criminal justice reform may find of interest. Here's a roundup of some of them:

- The **Prison Policy Institute**'s report, "Getting Back on Track," takes a look at the effect of incarceration on education attainment and finds that prison depresses an incarcerated person's likelihood of finishing high school or college. That, in turn, makes it less likely that a formerly incarcerated person will be likely to land a good-paying job. Read the report here and see the info graphic to the left.

- The Mackinac Center's **Kathryn Riley** has been working on a blog series about the need for bail reform in Michigan. Some of the posts so far include:

  - Bail Reform Effort in Michigan: What It Is and What It Isn't
  - How Bail Works in Michigan and Recommendations for Reform: a study
  - Money and Justice in West Michigan
  - What's Wrong with Bail Policy in Michigan

In addition, the Mackinaw Center conducted a brown bag lunch series on the cash bail system in Michigan and the need for reform. It can be replayed by visiting this site.

Get Involved!

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