

Safe & Just Michigan

Summer
2019



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Being incarcerated is a life-learned lesson. Take what you've been through and use it as a guide to rebuilding your life.
— E.B. Jordan, page 7

Michigan has seen a lot of movement toward criminal justice reform over the past few months, but Safe & Just Michigan is only getting started. The governor recently signed a **medically frail parole** bill into law and the **"Raise the Age"** package of legislation is near passage (see page 4). Next up: **Clean Slate**. SJM, with our organizational partners, has been hard at work building a coalition of justice-impacted people through workshops in Grand Rapids (above), Detroit (below, with **E.B. Jordan**, see page 7) and at other locations around the state. To learn more, see page 6.



Safe & Just Michigan

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Stay Connected After Your Parole

We are always delighted when any incarcerated member is paroled. If you would like to stay in touch, please call or write us with your new information.

Take Action

Encourage your friends, family and networks to tell their legislators, pastors and leaders of organizations about Safe & Just Michigan, our latest reports and the need for sensible justice reforms that will make our communities safe.

From the director's corner



*Executive Director
John S. Cooper*

Two brief updates for you:

First, the Legislature unexpectedly ended its spring session early and adjourned for the summer. This pushes our legislative efforts to reform Michigan's expungement law to the fall. We'll work over the summer to build public support and grassroots momentum for these reforms, so please stay tuned for ways to get involved. The reforms we're working on could help hundreds of thousands of people with criminal

records seal the public records of those convictions and access better jobs and housing for them and their families.

Second, please help us get the word out about our Annual Dinner Meeting, to be held Oct. 10 at the Radisson Hotel in Lansing.

This year, we're pleased to have **DeAnna Hoskins**, president and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA, as our featured speaker. We'll also present Rep. **David LaGrand** (D-Grand Rapids) with the 2019 Milliken Award for his outstanding work on criminal justice issues in the Legislature. It should be a great event!

Thank you,
John S. Cooper

SJM moves to a new address

It's hard to believe, but Safe & Just Michigan has outgrown its home.

The past year saw incredible growth for us. Policy wins like objective parole and medically frail parole show Michigan is ripe for criminal justice reform. Safe & Just Michigan leads the way on many potential policy changes, such as Clean Slate legislation.

We've added people to our team, increasing our ability to research, prepare legislation and do outreach. That's led to cramped quarters.

As of June 25, our new home will be:

**521 Seymour Ave.
Lansing MI, 48933**

Quite literally, it's just around the corner from where we were.

Please update our address in your records. We enjoy hearing from you and welcome your correspondence.

LGBTQ AWARENESS MONTH
WHEN LGBTQ PEOPLE ARE INCARCERATED THEY ARE ...

More likely to experience severe psychological distress

	Straight	BI or Gay
Men	13.6%	29.3%
Women	18.8%	24.7%

Source: SAMHSA's GAINS Center 2019 Factsheet on incarcerated LGBT people: <http://bit.ly/prisonlight>

More likely be held in solitary confinement or segregated housing

	Straight	BI or Gay
	18%	28%

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, "Use of Restrictive Housing in U.S. Prisons and Jails, 2011-12": <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/urhjn91112.pdf>

More likely to experience sexual violence while incarcerated

	Straight	BI or Gay
	9%	41%

Source: National Prison Rape Elimination Commission Report, 2009: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/22660a.pdf>

Sexual minorities are over-represented in prison

Incarceration rates of:

U.S. adults: 612 of every 100,000 people

Sexual minorities: 1,882 of every 100,000 people

Percent of population that identifies as a sexual minority in:

The U.S.: 3.5%

Men's prisons: 9.3%

Women's prisons: 42.1%

Source: SAMHSA's GAINS Center 2019 Factsheet on incarcerated LGBT people: <http://bit.ly/prisonlight>

Safe & Just Michigan
www.safeandjustmi.org

Meet Safe & Just Michigan's newest team members

Their former work includes debate coach, professor and museum curator

Safe & Just Michigan welcomed three new people to our team in May. With them on staff, we can do more research into Michigan's criminal justice system, reach more decision-makers and develop stronger strategies to advance criminal justice reform and ensure everything runs smoothly in our office and at events around the state.

Josh Hoe is our new policy analyst. He will assist with the development of policy initiatives,



Josh Hoe

review proposed rules and legislation, and help devise strategies for advancing criminal justice reforms. Before becoming active in policy work, Josh was a debate team coach for more than 20 years, most recently for the University of Michigan. Josh also has a personal experience with the criminal justice system that fuels his desire to bring about change within it.

He earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in international relations from the University of Central Oklahoma.

"I like seeing results," Josh said. "It's all about seeing people get out of prison, or getting the chance to work after prison, getting housing or finding community. It's all about seeing people become re-integrated as our neighbors. That's what motivates me."

Our new research specialist is

Anne Mahar, who comes from the world of academia. Her expertise in information-gathering and statistics will underpin our policy efforts. Most recently, she was an assistant professor of criminology and criminal justice at Arcadia University in Pennsylvania.

Among her most memorable classes were the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program semesters she taught. Those classes brought college



Anne Mahar

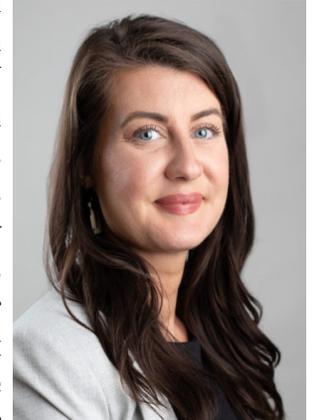
students into jail to learn alongside people who were incarcerated. The students — who came from both the university and from jail — learned the course material as well as from each other.

She holds a doctorate in criminology and criminal justice from Dominion University and bachelor's and master's degrees from Eastern Michigan University.

"On the first day of the program, many of the students were terrified. Some of them had really hardline ideas about crime and punishment," Anne said. "But it's a lot harder to be a hardliner once you get to know people face-to-face. I got to see many 'a-ha' moments from my students when they realized that people who are incarcerated are just like anyone else — we want the same things from life, we even like to talk about the same TV shows."

We have a new office manager with **Veronica French** joining our

team. Veronica had been on the staff of the Michigan State University Museum, where she was working on the museum's collections, exhibits and administration. She is most proud of her work on the exhibit "Finding our Voice: Sister Survivors Speak," which reflected on the crisis of sexual violence on the MSU campus in recent years and was curated by the survivors and their allies. That experience made her want to do more social justice work.



Veronica French

She has a bachelor's degree in anthropology from MSU.

"I'm a very empathetic person," she said. "I look forward to being at an organization that is working to find ways to better the community and better people's lives. I want to help people see better options to the way things are now."

Finally, we said a bittersweet goodbye to our operations manager **Judi Miller**, who retired at the end of May. We know that she has a lot of good things planned for her free time, and we are glad to know that she will finally have the time to do them all. We wish her the best!



Judi Miller

POLICY UPDATE

'Raise the Age' awaits signature

Legislation to make 18, not 17, the age at which young people are considered adults in criminal courts is waiting to take its final steps through the legislative process. Both the House and Senate passed their version of the bills. Now, the chambers must hammer out differences between the versions before Gov. **Gretchen Whitmer** can sign them into law. She has already indicated support for the plan.

The city of Detroit sued on cash bail

The ACLU of Michigan has filed a class-action lawsuit against the 36th District Court in Detroit. It alleges cash bail amounts levied against defendants result in poorer defendants awaiting resolution of legal problems in jail while wealthier counterparts can go home.

"A person's freedom should not depend on how much money they have," **Dan Korobkin**, ACLU of Michigan's deputy legal director, said in a news release. "Bail ... punishes people not for what they've done but because of what they don't have."

According to the ACLU of Michigan:

- 85 percent of people arraigned in the 36th District Court are ordered to pay bail in order to be released.
- 62 percent of the people in Wayne County Jail are there simply because they can't afford to make bail.



A man representing nursing homes tells the House Judiciary Committee in February why his organization has reservations about the medically frail parole law.

Medically frail parole now law

Michigan finally has a medically frail parole law, though it's not as strong as Safe & Just Michigan would like it to be.

The law carves out people sentenced to life without parole — namely, people convicted of first-degree murder — or people convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. As written, the law only applies to about 30 people, though SJM estimates about 850 people incarcerated in Michigan meet the definition of "medically frail."

SJM understands this legislation is far from perfect, but we backed it with the anticipation that it can be improved upon later. The ACLU of Michigan and American Friends Service Committee Michigan Criminal Justice Program joined us with their support.

"This common-sense reform is long overdue and will provide cost relief to the Department of Corrections and a path to more appropriate care to many medically frail people in Michigan's prison system," SJM Executive Director **John Cooper** said in a statement.

"However ... this law excludes many of the people it was designed to help from eligibility based on the crime they committed instead of their current medical frailty. Medically frail people do not — by definition — pose any risk to the public. It makes little sense from a policy perspective to exclude them from eligibility. We hope that the Legislature revisits this decision in the future once this program has shown that paroling incarcerated people who are medically frail is the smart and right thing to do."

An association of nursing homes voiced reservations because it would put limits on medically frail parolees in their care, such as the freedom of movement and the ability to receive visitors. That would violate patient rights that nursing homes believe all patients should have.

The Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, who fought to insert the carve-outs for people with life without parole sentences and first-degree sex offense convictions, was ultimately neutral on the bill.

Getting serious about getting back to work

State weighs changing rules to help formerly incarcerated get jobs

Millions of Michiganders with a criminal record struggle to find jobs with good wages — or any work at all — because state licensing boards use their criminal record as a justification to deny them an occupational license.

For these people who want to work, it's not a lack of skills holding them back. Vocational training programs in state prisons, as well as previous work experience and college and job training programs after release, teach them the skills and abilities employers most need.

The problem is the “good moral character” requirement in many license applications. Licensing boards use the requirement to exclude people with a criminal record.

“This is about making sure that folks who are re-entering society have an opportunity to get back to work and fill some of the job vacancies that we have in this state,” Rep. **Brandt Iden** (R-Oshtemo Township), one of the bill sponsors of the pending legislation recently told the House Regulatory Reform Committee.

Opening job opportunities to formerly incarcerated people



Barbering is one of many careers requiring an occupational license in Michigan. Many of these licenses have a “good moral character” requirement that has been used to exclude justice-involved people, but that could be about to change.

makes good sense for everyone. When people earn good wages they can achieve economic security and provide for their families. People who find employment soon after release from prison are also as much as 20 percent less likely to return to prison.

House Bills 4488-93 would end the practice of excluding people with a criminal record from qualifying for a license in most cases, while allowing boards flexibility to consider whether granting a license would endanger the public when making the decision to grant a license.

The Mackinac Center is leading the effort on the bills, which have bipartisan sponsorship. Safe & Just Michigan supports the legislation, along with

organizations such as ACLU of Michigan, Americans for Prosperity-Michigan and the Michigan League for Public Policy.

House Bill 4488 changes current law by telling licensing boards that a criminal record isn't grounds for denying a license unless all these conditions are met:

- The record includes a felony conviction.
- The licensing statute states that the type of felony involved is a disqualifying offense.
- The licensing board concludes the offense has a direct, specific negative effect on the applicant's ability to perform the duties authorized by the license.
- The licensing board determines the state's interest in protecting public safety is superior to the individual's right to pursue the occupation **only if** it can be based on all of the following:
- The offense is substantially related to the state's interest in protecting public safety.



Electricians must be licensed in Michigan. The governor has directed the Michigan Department of Corrections to work with the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to help incarcerated people apply for licenses before release.

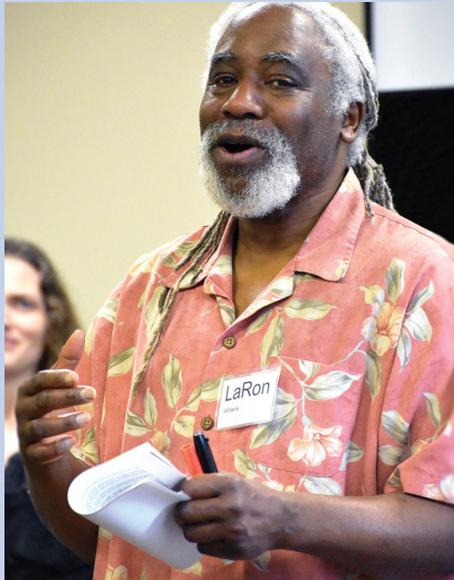
See: [Licensing, page 7](#)

OUTREACH UPDATE

Building the winning team

Safe & Just Michigan assembles a Clean Slate coalition

Clean Slate legislation will be a momentous change for the people in Michigan who have a criminal record. But big changes don't come easy, and that's why Safe & Just Michigan has built alliances with justice-involved people and other criminal justice reform organizations to give Clean Slate legislation the strongest support possible when it enters the state Capitol.



Professional storyteller La'Ron Williams helps formerly incarcerated people unlock the power of their life story in Detroit.

We worked with our friends at the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness to bring professional storytellers to Grand Rapids and Detroit. There, formerly incarcerated people got advice on how to turn their life experience into a powerful tool when communicating with legislators. We've also paired with JustLeadershipUSA to host a series of Clean Slate update sessions in nine Michigan cities. Some were co-hosted with partners like ARRO Advocacy and Nation Outside.

In the coming months, we'll hold an advocacy day at the Capitol where our coalition will tell elected officials why they should support Clean Slate.

Stay tuned!



Signs on the table at a meeting in Ypsilanti spell out the goal of Clean Slate legislation. Photo: Prof. Aaron Kinzel, University of Michigan-Dearborn.



Participants at the storytelling training session in Grand Rapids listen to someone sharing their experiences.



JustLeadershipUSA's Hakim Crampton facilitates a Clean Slate update session in Ypsilanti. Photo: Prof. Aaron Kinzel, University of Michigan-Dearborn.

MEDIA MENTIONS

SJM supports Faith in Action

SJM's Executive Director **John Cooper** attended Michigan Faith in Action's legislative day on June 11.

WILX-TV 10 Lansing, June 11: "The group held a press conference called Clean Slate Michigan. The group said they believe that automatic record clearing is critical to healing out communities and making Michigan safer.

"A representative from Nation Outside, **Tony Gant** and Safe & Just Michigan Executive Director John Cooper came to discuss the Clean

Slate Campaign and its impact. Also present was Michigan Faith in Action Executive Director **Eileen Hayes**, who is a member of SJM's board.

"Nonpartisan and multicultural, Michigan Faith in Action has been around since 2006. They partner with diverse faith groups in all corners of the state."



Eileen Hayes

Licensing: Changes could open jobs to formerly incarcerated people ... from page 5

- The applicant, based on the nature of the offense and information provided, is more likely to commit a subsequent offense if granted the license.
- An offense committed with the aid of a license will cause more harm to the public than if the individual didn't have it.

HB 4488 directs boards to weigh factors besides the presence of a criminal history, such as how long ago the offense occurred, evidence of rehabilitation, testimonials, employment history and employment aspirations.

The remaining bills in the package update the definition of "good moral character" in various occupational codes and acts and require annual reports to the Legislature outlining how many licensure denials were made under the "good moral character" clause.

Meanwhile, Gov. **Gretchen Whitmer** unveiled a partnership

between the Michigan Department of Corrections and Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA).

Under the partnership, the MDOC and LARA will help incarcerated people apply for occupational licenses before released. The program focuses on people studying cosmetology, building trades, plumbing, electrical, masonry and barbering in MDOC Career Technical Education Programs.

The program pre-screens people to determine whether jobs are available in their chosen field and home community. The agreement directs LARA to inform someone if their criminal record disqualifies them from obtaining a license.

"Increasing employment opportunities for returning citizens reduces recidivism and improves public safety," Whitmer said in a press release. "These measures are crucial as we make our state a home for opportunity for all Michiganders."

Three things I wish I knew *Life after release*

Name: E.B. Jordan

Title: Founder of S&D PJ Housing, Block Club President



City: Detroit

Years since release: 8

Advice to others looking forward to release:

1 I wish the Huron Valley women's prison had a better release program. When I was released I had to put together my own program. That's why I started S&D PJ Housing.

2 I wish I'd known that the two years in building trades at Huron Valley, building the Habitat for Humanity housing, would not help me when I got out. I couldn't apply for a house to live in or work for them because I was a felon.

3 Being incarcerated is a life-learned lesson. Take what you've been through and use it as a guide to rebuilding your life. Get with organizations like Safe & Just Michigan and find a positive outlet to tell your story. It could help someone in the long run.

Safe & Just Michigan

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*Please note our
new address!*

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TELL YOUR LOVED ONES TO

Save the Date! • Thursday, Oct. 10, 2019

SAFE & JUST MICHIGAN ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

Featuring state and national criminal justice leaders



Please invite your loved ones to join us for an evening of fellowship, legislative updates and discussion about the future of criminal justice reform featuring JustLeadershipUSA President and CEO **DeAnna R. Hoskins**. We will also present Rep. **David LaGrand** (D-Grand Rapids) with the Gov. William Milliken Award for his work on criminal justice and bail reform.

Because of our publication schedule, this will be our last chance to remind you of this event.

Safe & Just Michigan

MAKING SECOND CHANCES A FIRST PRIORITY

Check back in our fall edition for photos and stories from the event