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Bipartisan Coalition: Lawmakers Have Opportunity for Progress on Nonpartisan Jails Task Force Reform

LANSING – Representatives from Americans for Prosperity, the ACLU of Michigan, Safe and Just Michigan and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy today enthusiastically thanked Republican and Democratic lawmakers for their leadership in 2020 on bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation.

The House and the Senate have the opportunity during the few remaining days of the legislative term to provide final passage for the last Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration bills in this term's reform package, and to once again protect every Michiganders' constitutional rights.

The coalition of reform advocates applauded Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, House Speaker Lee Chatfield, committee chairmen Senator Peter Lucido and Representative Graham Filler, and their colleagues for the nearly unanimous support shown for bills reflecting recommendations from the nonpartisan Task Force.

"Believe it or not, progressives and conservatives can find common ground," said **Annie Patnaude, State Director for Americans for Prosperity**. "When it comes to criminal justice reform in Michigan, we have. We agree that the Constitution matters. We agree that Michiganders constitutional rights matter, too.

"Lawmakers have spent this session addressing task force reforms that put people first and stand up for every individuals' constitutional rights. With just a month left on the legislature's calendar, they deserve our thanks, and advocates are offering their encouragement to complete passage of the remaining task force bills."

(MORE)

The legislature has already approved nearly two-dozen criminal justice reform bills and sent them to the Governor's desk. **18 bills remain on the legislative docket for final passage.** *Each has received sweeping, near-unanimous support from lawmakers at each step of the legislative process.*

Jails Task Force bills awaiting final action during the "lame duck" legislative session include House Bills 58,44, 5846, 5847, 5849-5857, and Senate Bills 1046-1051.

"These bills mean make communities safer and stronger," **said Kimberly Buddin, Policy Counsel at ACLU of Michigan.** "They also strive for equality and fairness as they help dismantle racism in the criminal legal system.

"This package proves that when we work together, we can make real progress in Lansing for real people across Michigan."

The bipartisan legislation reforms laws around:

Drivers license suspensions: The bills help individuals better pay their fines, take care of their families and contribute to their communities;

Mandatory minimum sentencing: The bills give judges the needed discretion to more effectively protect our communities, and residents' constitutional rights;

Case initiation: The reform grants law enforcement officers with non-arrest alternatives for a variety of minor, non-violent and driving offenses;

Sentencing and probation: One of the most common reasons people are jailed in Michigan is for driving on a suspended license, often the consequence of unpaid tickets. These bills would help address that;

Racial justice and fairness: Research shows that Black residents are up to 6 times more likely to be in county jail than white residents. The bipartisan bills will help address racial disparities in our criminal legal system, and more.

"The broad bipartisan support for these bills has been very encouraging," **said John Cooper, Executive Director of Safe and Just Michigan.** "Smart criminal justice policy saves resources and improves public safety. Clearly. These are outcomes we can all agree on."

Said David Guenthner, with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy: "At least 59 misdemeanor offenses carry *mandatory* minimum sentences that prevent judges from using their discretion to protect our communities and residents' constitutional rights. These mandatory minimums can prevent those with mental illnesses and those accused of incredibly minor violations from getting the help they need, and making it more likely they will be back in court again later.

"Improving this system is a goal we can all get behind, and it's why Republicans and Democrats are so united behind these reforms."

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