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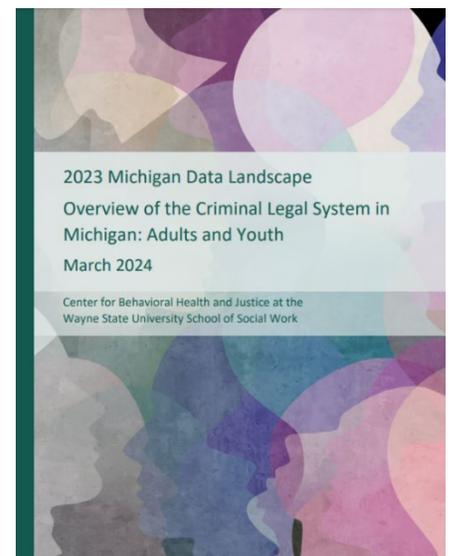jessica.best@wayne.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CBHJ report assesses changes in jail policy and youth justice reform

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A new report released today by the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice at the Wayne State University School of Social Work (CBHJ) reviews implementation of reform and assessment efforts in Michigan's adult and youth justice systems. The report, which builds upon the CBHJ's inaugural landscape report released in 2021, lays the groundwork for future and ongoing transformative work across the state.

The report is divided into six chapters, the first two of which provide an updated landscape of the criminal/legal and youth justice systems using recent publicly available data. Next, the report looks at changes in jail bookings across Michigan following policy changes form the Michigan Jail Reform Council. The focus then shifts to youth justice with a case study evaluation of the implementation of the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument™ (YASI) in one county. Finally, the report reviews efforts made toward integrating criminal/legal data.

The landscape report was jointly funded by Public Welfare Foundation (PWF) and the Michigan Justice Fund (MJF) as part of their work to promote awareness of variation in state contexts and outcomes of the criminal legal system transformation. "A new, transformative approach to justice is possible. That's why Public Welfare Foundation invests deeply in local ecosystems throughout the country, including Michigan, to help grow systems of support that are comparable to the need in our communities," said Jed Oppenheim, Program Director of Public Welfare Foundation and Steering Committee Co-Chair, Michigan Justice Fund. "Consistent information can move public discourse beyond rhetorical frames to real transformation. It is our hope that this

report will provide Michiganders with reliable information about local legal systems and increase understanding of how resources are being used."

Jail policy analysis

CBHJ researchers collected jail data from 12 jails across the state to assess the implementation of recent legislative reform. More specifically, the report focuses on five of the recommendations issued by the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Recommendation and monitored by the Michigan Jail Reform Advisory Council (JRAC). These policy amendments, which became law in 2021, sought to shift from jail time for minor offenses to appearance/summons tickets. Additionally, the report looked for changes in driver's license suspensions following Clean Slate.

This data analysis offers preliminary evidence that the reforms may have had some impact on jail bookings during the study period. Misdemeanor bookings, in particular non-serious misdemeanors targeted by the reforms, did decrease following the reforms. "For now, this evidence should be taken as encouraging in that booking levels for those offenses connected to legislation in most counties remain lower than they were before the pandemic," states the paper.

"The pandemic's disruption on the criminal legal system cannot be understated and had clear impacts," the paper continues. However, recent evidence points to the waning influence of the reforms on who is entering some of the jails across the state. This study is the first data-driven look at the impact of Michigan's jail reforms, and the paper encourages further evaluation of the jail reforms.

Assessing risk in youth justice

As a precursor to the juvenile justice reform legislation passed in 2023, the report evaluates the implementation of the YASI assessment in one Michigan county. Youth justice experts suggest that the most effective approach to reducing recidivism is to identify the youth's risk of re-offending and shape service options to match risk level. For example, diverting youth at lowest risk and focusing a more intensive supervision and services for youth at the highest risk for reoffending. The YASI aims to do just that, assessing a young person's risk and needs and responding accordingly.

The case study found that the YASI assessment was successful in diverting low-risk youth from the system, and that most of the youth who completed the assessment had low or moderate risk of reoffending. By providing the right interventions targeted at the youth's specific needs, most of the youth assessed using the YASI stand a good chance of reducing their risk for future re-offending and reducing their chance of entering the adult criminal justice system.

Additionally, the report found that objective risk assessment could be used as a tool for reducing racial disparities in the youth justice system. While the study did find an overrepresentation of black youth who came before the court, there was no disparity found among the youth who were diverted with the risk assessment.

"A tool such as the YASI provides a multi-layered, multi-faceted view of each youth that challenges the oversimplified labels applied to justice-involved youth," the report states. "By looking beyond what the youth has been charged and considering the different domains in their life, we can see them perhaps more closely to how they see themselves—as individuals who are involved with the court system and face certain challenges but who also have strengths, interests, passions, hopes and dreams."

Data integration

The inaugural landscape report provided a roadmap and baseline for advancing change in data collection and reporting within Michigan's adult and youth justice systems. The report helped identify limitations in Michigan's criminal/legal data, particularly the inability to integrate data across divergent systems (i.e. jails, courts, MDOC). Following the development of said report, the authors and other vital partners recognized the need and value of integrated data, thus the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice, in collaboration with partners, the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), developed a multiphase approach to achieve integrated criminal legal system data through the Cross-system Data Integration Project (CDIP). The CDIP, supported by the Michigan Justice Fund, aimed to improve the efficiency and transparency of adult criminal legal and youth justice system data through collaboration between state and county-level partners. The final chapter of the report details the efforts undergone by the CDIP since the first report was published.

"Data driven decisions that affect MI taxpayers – as well as individuals and families involved in the criminal/legal system – require robust and accurate information," said Sheryl Kubiak, Center for Behavioral Health and Justice director and School of Social Work dean. "Integrating that data across systems benefits the operation of those systems, as well as MI policy makers and concerned citizens."

About the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice: *The Wayne State University School of Social Work Center for Behavioral Health and envisions communities in which research, data, and best practices are used by multiple stakeholders to enhance the optimal well-being of individuals with mental illness and/or substance use disorders who come into contact with the criminal/legal system. Learn more*

About Public Welfare Foundation: *For over seventy years, Public Welfare Foundation has supported efforts to advance justice and opportunity for people in need. Today, our efforts focus on catalyzing a transformative approach to justice that is community-led, restorative, and racially just through investments in criminal justice and youth justice reforms. These efforts honor the Foundation's core values of racial equality, economic well-being, and fundamental fairness for all. Learn more*

About the Michigan Justice Fund: *The Michigan Justice Fund is a collaborative fund committed to promoting and advancing the prosperity and dignity of Michigan residents by stemming the flow of individuals into the youth and criminal justice systems, supporting the investment of public dollars to community-driven alternatives to incarceration and detention, and by ensuring those who are returning home after incarceration or detention receive the support they need to flourish. Learn more*

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