Wayne County Commission supports raising age at which defendants can be tried as adults

Wayne County Commissioners Thursday, May 2, unanimously backed a resolution supporting efforts in the Michigan Legislature to increase the age at which teenage defendants can be tried as adults.

The resolution notes that Michigan is one of only five U.S. states that automatically tries 17-year-olds as adults for all offenses, putting them at risk by placing them in the adult justice system. The resolution was presented by Commissioner Al Haidous (D-Wayne), who presented a similar resolution last year when the state Legislature first took up the issue.

While leaving open the possibility that 17-year-olds could be tried as adults for violent crimes, the Michigan Senate approved a “raise the age” bill package in April on a pair of 37-1 and 36-2 votes. The matter is now before the Michigan House.
The Wayne County Commission resolution notes that 18 is the recognized age of adulthood in Michigan law and that 17-year-olds cannot vote or purchase tobacco, fireworks or lottery tickets, among other restrictions.

Raise the age supporters indicate that Michigan had more than 7,200 defendants aged 17 in 2016.

Nine states have raised the age limit for adult sentencing to 18 since 2007, and Missouri will do so in 2021.

In April, the commission unanimously approved a resolution by Chair Alisha Bell calling on the Michigan Legislature to end the state’s cash bond system. The resolution stated the present system unfairly keeps poor defendants in jail solely because of their inability to come up with the cash necessary for their release and also costs Michigan counties more to cover the cost of those defendants extended jail time.