

Senate Bill 81 (as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Sue Shink
Committee: Rights, Judiciary, and Public Safety

Date Completed: 4-25-25

RATIONALE

Governor Whitmer signed Executive Order (EO) 2021-6 creating the Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform (Task Force) within the Department of Health and Human Services. The Task Force was charged with analyzing Michigan's juvenile justice system and recommending changes to State law, policy, and appropriations (see **BACKGROUND**). The Task Force found that the State has no centralized structure, standards, or resources to ensure juvenile public defense. Accordingly, it has been suggested that the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) develop and oversee indigent youth defense standards within local county systems.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Indigent Defense Commission Act to do the following:

- **Specify that the MIDC would serve indigent adults and indigent youths.**
- **Modify certain definitions to delete the term "criminal".**
- **Delete certain requirements that would qualify an individual as indigent and require the MIDC to establish standards and procedures of indigency.**
- **Expand the MIDC from 18 members to 19 members.**
- **Allow the MIDC to email certain notices to indigent defense systems.**
- **Prohibit youth from waiving the right to counsel unless the youth were advised on the consequences of waiver and the waiver was on the record and in writing.**
- **Require the MIDC to establish procedures to resolve specified disputes with a noncompliant indigent defense system.**
- **Prohibit the MIDC from issuing a grant to an indigent defense system without an approved plan and cost analysis required by the Act.**
- **Require the first MIDC grant installment to an indigent defense system to be 40% of the system's grant award and the three subsequent awards to be 20% each.**

The bill would take effect on October 1, following its enactment.

Modified & Added Definitions

Under the Act, "indigent" means an individual who meets certain conditions under Section 11(3). Instead, under the bill, "indigent" would mean an inability to obtain competent legal representation for oneself without substantial financial hardship to oneself or one's dependents, as determined using standards and procedures under the Act.

"Indigent criminal defense services" means local legal defense services provided to a defendant and to which the following apply:

- The defendant is being prosecuted or sentenced for a crime for which an individual may be imprisoned upon conviction, beginning with the defendant's initial appearance in court to answer to the criminal charge.
- The defendant is determined to be indigent.

The term does not include services authorized to be provided under the Appellate Defender Act.

The bill would modify the term. It would delete "criminal" from "indigent criminal defense system" and the term would refer instead to "indigent defense services." Under the bill, the term would mean local legal defense services provided to any of the following:

- *An indigent adult* who is being prosecuted or sentenced for a crime for which the adult may be imprisoned upon conviction, beginning no later than the initial appearance in court to answer to the criminal charge.
- *An indigent youth* who is, or is alleged to be, under the jurisdiction of the court under Section 2(a), 2(d), or 2(h) of the juvenile Code, beginning no later than the youth's initial appearance in court.

(Generally, under the juvenile Code, Section 2(a) provides the family court with exclusive original jurisdiction in proceedings concerning juveniles under most conditions. Section 2(d) specifies that a family court will have concurrent jurisdiction if the court finds that voluntary services have been exhausted or refused for a juvenile between 17 and 18 years of age facing drug or alcohol addiction, criminal association, involvement in illicit activities, or disobedience to authority. Section 2(h) gives the family division of a circuit court jurisdiction over the issuance of personal protection orders concerning minors.)

The term would not include services authorized to be provided under the Appellate Defender Act or *services provided by a lawyer-guardian ad litem under Section 17c(7) to (10) of the juvenile Code*. (Section 17c(7) to (10) of the juvenile Code specifies the procedures for appointing a guardian that represents the child's legal interests in certain legal proceedings.)

"Local share" or "share" means an indigent criminal defense system's average annual expenditure for indigent defense services in the three fiscal years immediately preceding the creation of the MIDC, excluding money reimbursed to the system by individuals' determined to be partially indigent. If the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased since November 1, of the prior State fiscal year, the local share must be adjusted by that number or by 3%, whichever is less. The bill would modify this definition, and instead, the term would mean an indigent defense system's average annual expenditure for indigent adult defense services in the three fiscal years immediately preceding the creation of the MIDC *and indigent youth defense services in the three fiscal years immediately preceding the bill's effective date*. If the CPI has increased since November 1, of the prior State fiscal year, the local share would have to be adjusted *and compounded annually* by that number or by 3%, whichever is less.

"Youth" would mean an individual who is less than 18 years of age and the subject of a delinquency petition.

Indigent Defense Service Minimum Standards

The MIDC is an autonomous entity within the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) and is responsible for proposing minimum standards for the local delivery of indigent defense services. The bill would specify that these services would apply to adults and youth.

Before submitting a minimum standard to LARA for approval, the MIDC must convene a public hearing on that minimum standard. Once LARA approves a minimum standard, that standard is final. Under the bill, the MIDC could amend an approved minimum standard at any time after convening a public hearing and submitting the proposed amendment to LARA. If a proposed minimum standard had been recommended to LARA but not yet approved or rejected, the MIDC could modify the proposed standard. If the MIDC modified the standard, the MIDC would have to reconvene a public hearing before recommending the modified standard to LARA.

MIDC Membership

Under the Act, the MIDC includes 18 voting members appointed by the Governor and the Supreme Court Chief Justice or his or her designee who serves as an ex officio member without a vote. Under the bill, the MIDC would include 19 members and the Supreme Court Chief Justice or his or her designee. The Governor would have to appoint the 19th member from a list of three names submitted by the children's law section of the State Bar of Michigan who was experienced in defending youth in delinquency proceedings. Additionally, the Governor would have to appoint at least two individuals who were licensed attorneys and at least one individual with substantial knowledge of the juvenile justice system, replacing a requirement that the Governor appoint at least two individuals who are not attorneys.

The Act specifies that appointed members of the MIDC must have significant experience in the defense or prosecution of criminal proceedings or have demonstrated a strong commitment to providing effective representation in indigent defense services. The bill would specify that an appointed member of the MIDC would have to have one of the qualifications listed above or have significant experience in the defense or prosecution of youth in juvenile proceedings.

The Act requires the MIDC to establish minimum standards, rules, and procedures to effectuate the following provisions:

- The delivery of indigent services must be independent of the judiciary but ensure that judges are permitted and encouraged to contribute information and advice concerning the delivery.
- If the caseload is sufficiently high, the services may consist of the defender office and the active participation of other members of the State Bar.
- Trial courts must ensure that each criminal defendant is advised of the right to counsel.
- All adults, except those appearing with retained counsel or those who have made an informed waiver of counsel, must be screened for eligibility under the Act and counsel must be assigned as soon as an indigent adult is determined eligible.

Under the bill, youth could not waive the right to counsel without first consulting with counsel on the consequences of waiver. If a youth waived the right to counsel, it would have to be on the record and in writing.

Appointment of Indigent Criminal Defense Services

The Act prescribes requirements for the application and appointment of indigent criminal defense services. Generally, there must be a preliminary inquiry regarding the determination of the indigency of any defendant no later than the defendant's first appearance in court; the determination is made by considering the defendant's ability to pay. The defendant is considered indigent if he or she is unable, without substantial financial hardship, to obtain competent, qualified legal representation which is presumed based on certain criteria, such as the dependent earning less than 140% of the Federal poverty guidelines, receiving certain

public assistance, or currently serving a sentence in a correctional facility, among other things. Additionally, the Act prescribes the process for determining whether a defendant is partially indigent. The bill would delete these provisions. Instead, the MIDC would have to establish standards and procedures of indigency.

Partially Indigent Reimbursement

Under the Act, a court must collect money from individuals determined to be partially indigent. The court must remit all the funds collected to the indigent defense system in which the court sits, and 20% of these remitted funds must go to LARA. The MIDC must spend the funds received by LARA in support of indigent criminal defense systems in the State. Under the bill, the MIDC would have to spend the funds received by LARA to implement the MIDC's minimum standards and to ensure that indigent defense systems complied with the minimum standards.

MIDC Plan or Cost Analysis

After a standard is approved, each system must submit a plan for the provision of indigent services to the MIDC. The plan must address how the minimum standards will be met and include a cost analysis. Within 60 days after a plan and cost analysis are submitted, the MIDC must approve or disapprove the plan or cost analysis, or both. If the MIDC disapproved one or both, the system must consult with the MIDC and submit a new plan or cost analysis within 30 days of the mailing date of the notice of disapproval. The bill would specify that the notice of disapproval could be emailed.

Compliance Dispute Process

The Act requires the MIDC to establish procedures for the conduct of its affairs and promulgate policies necessary to carry out its powers and duties. Under the bill, the MIDC would have to establish resolution procedures related to a dispute with an indigent defense system that did not comply with the following requirements of the Act:

- The system, and attorneys engaged in providing indigent defense services within the system, must cooperate and participate with an MIDC investigation, audit, and review of the system's services in an effort to make certain that the system meets MIDC standards.
- Every local unit of government that is part of an indigent defense system must comply with an approved plan under the Act.

The procedures would have to be on a public website. If a dispute concerning compliance could not be resolved through the MIDC resolution procedure, the MIDC or indigent defense system could bring an action seeking equitable relief in the circuit court within 30 days of the MIDC's determination that the system had breached its duty to comply with any of the following:

- An approved plan.
- A cost analysis.
- A grant contract provision.
- Noncompliance with the provisions listed above.

Grant Awards

The bill specifies that the MIDC could not award a grant to indigent defense systems to assist in bringing the system into compliance with minimum standards or grants to local units of government for reasonable costs associated with data collection unless the indigent defense system had an approved cost analysis required by the Act.

The first MIDC grant installment to an indigent defense system would have to be 40% of the system's grant award. The three subsequent MIDC grant installments would have to each be 20% of the indigent defense system's grant award. After the first installment, the three subsequent installments would have to be based on the MIDC's review and approval of documentation of expenditures and unexpended funds pursuant to the Act described below. The indigent defense system's documented expenditures for the prior quarter could not be less than 25% of the total approved plan and cost analysis.

(The Act specifies that if an indigent defense system does not fully use grant funds, the unspent amount will reduce future grants and that any misuse must be repaid or deducted from future grants. Additionally, if a system spends more than its allocated funds due to unexpected needs, the MIDC may recommend covering those costs in future grants for justified expenses.)

The MIDC could allow an indigent defense system to request to be exempt from the grant requirements described above for unforeseeable conditions that could prohibit timely expenditure processing by the system.

MCL 780.983 et al.

BACKGROUND

Juvenile Justice Task Force

Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed EO 2021-6 on June 9, 2021, which, among other things, created the Task Force as a temporary advisory body within the Department of Health and Human Services. The Task Force was charged with acting in an advisory capacity with the goal of developing ambitious, innovative, and thorough analysis of Michigan's juvenile justice system and providing recommendations for changes to State law, policy, and appropriations aimed to improve youth outcomes.¹

The Task Force released its report and recommendations on July 22, 2022. Overall, the report found that the quality of services and case management received by youth, from defense to post-disposition placement, differs across the State. The State lacks uniform judicial justice policies and quality assurance standards, leading to disparities the State cannot address and data it cannot rely upon. Additionally, the lack of State centralization has led to discrepancies in the implementation of research-based, developmentally appropriate practices across the State. Accordingly, children participating in the judicial justice system may not receive quality care or may receive care different from their peers.

Among other recommendations, the Task Force unanimously recommended that the MIDC be expanded to include development, oversight, and compliance with youth defense standards in local county defense systems.²

Michigan Indigent Defense Commission

Governor Rick Snyder signed EO 2011-12 on October 13, 2011, creating the Indigent Defense Advisory Commission (Commission). The Commission was charged with recommending improvements to the State's public criminal defense services and the system of providing legal representation for indigent criminal defendants, among other things. The Commission released its report and recommendations on June 22, 2012. Generally, the report found that

¹ Executive Order 2021-6.

² *Michigan Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform Report and Recommendations*, p. 17, July 22, 2022.

the Michigan Constitution establishes the right to assistance of counsel for criminal defense and that the lack of State centralization created discrepancies in how each county system interpreted serving indigent defendants leading to ineffective counsel and inconsistent funding. The Commission recommended creating a permanent commission on indigent defense, for the Legislature to adopt and incorporate standards for such a commission and for local systems, and that while indigent defense is a State obligation, funding should be a shared responsibility where local governments should be required to maintain certain levels of funding. The MIDC was created by Public Act 93 of 2013. The MIDC's current standards set requirements for education, training, and representation of defense counsel that cover areas such as knowledge of law, scientific evidence, technology, client interviews, investigations, and compensation.

PREVIOUS LEGISLATION

(This section does not provide a comprehensive account of previous legislative efforts on this subject matter.)

The bill is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 424 and House Bill 4630 of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session. House Bill 4630 passed the House and the Senate but the Senate requested a return after its passage. Senate Bill 424 was reported from the Senate Committee on Civil Rights, Judiciary, and Public Safety and then reassigned to the Committee at a later date.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Providing legal representation for children accused of crimes regardless of the child's financial status ensures the State is protecting the US Constitutional right to representation under the Fourteenth Amendment. The United States Supreme Court determined that the due process clause of the Constitution applies to both juvenile and adult defendants, which includes having an attorney appointed if a minor is unable to afford counsel.³ Passing the bill would ensure that Michigan complied with due process rights.

Supporting Argument

Under the Sixth Amendment of the US Constitution, the assistance of counsel must be effective in that a defense attorney should be qualified to perform adequate and competent representation when performing his or her lawful obligations. According to testimony before the Senate Committee on Civil Rights, Judiciary, and Public Safety, many attorneys are absent in vital parts of the juvenile defense trial process. Counsel that is present is often unqualified, unsupported, and untrained in the specific nature of juvenile defenses. Reportedly, this is a product of the system not being set up to provide that support.

Testimony indicates that the issue mirrors the State's previously resolved problem in providing adult indigent defense services prior to the creation of the MIDC. Currently, the MIDC provides grants to 120 funding units so each unit may comply with its standards, which include attorney education and training (see **BACKGROUND**). Additionally, expanding the MIDC to include juvenile indigent defense is necessary due to the specific challenges of juvenile defense; minors lack the education, emotional maturity, legal understanding, and access to resources to represent themselves in a delinquency proceeding. The current MIDC framework does not include standards for public defenders engaging with parents, school systems, and other social services as a holistic approach to competent juvenile defense. The bill's use of the MIDC's current model for juvenile defense would address deficiencies in a proven and effective manner.

³ In re Gault, 387 U.S. 1 (1967)

Supporting Argument

A strong public juvenile defense system can prioritize diversion which can reduce the burden on the legal system and State funding for corrections. For any increase in prison intakes, the average annual cost of housing a prisoner in a State correctional facility is an estimated \$48,700. According to testimony, youth who avoid jail time are more likely to succeed in other aspects of their lives. Diverted youth are also less likely to be subsequent offenders and are more likely to have positive outcomes in education and employment compared to youth who are arrested and prosecuted in juvenile courts. Specifically, nationwide recidivism data show that 70 to 80% of youth released from residential corrections programs are rearrested within two to three years and 45 to 72% of that population is adjudicated or convicted of a new offense within three years.⁴ Additionally, in Michigan it is estimated that placement in juvenile detention reduces the likelihood of high school graduation by 31% and increases the likelihood of arrest as an adult by 25%.⁵ Providing effective legal representation through indigent juvenile defense would help reduce recidivism and improve long-term youth outcomes.

Supporting Argument

Providing indigent youth access to an attorney can be the determining factor between being found innocent or guilty and facing incarceration simply because they did not understand their rights or failed to consider the consequences before them. In many instances, minors are particularly at risk of coercion or making a false confession during interrogations due to a lack of understanding of legal rights, such as the right to remain silent or right to an attorney.⁶ According to testimony, minors are more prone to risk-taking behavior and are less likely to consider the consequences of their actions. Specifically, in many instances the decision-making process for minors is motivated by short term rewards opposed to the threat of long-term consequences, leading to impulsive and sometimes criminal behavior.⁷ Due to the cognitive, social, and emotional maturity of minors, the bill should be passed to establish a system of adequate representation in juvenile proceedings and ensure that minors understand their rights and make informed decisions.

Opposing Argument

The bill would not ensure that public funds are truly directed to children and families who cannot afford an attorney or are otherwise indigent. According to testimony, nearly all children themselves would be considered indigent. The bill lacks a method to properly assess the child's parents or guardians' ability to provide paid legal representation through Federal poverty guidelines or another means test. In turn, the State would be responsible for covering legal fees for all children regardless of familial indigency.

Response: The bill defines "indigent" as an inability to obtain competent legal representation for oneself without substantial financial hardship to oneself or one's dependents, as determined using standards and procedures under the Act. The MIDC would be responsible for developing such standards and ensuring that funds are directed to the appropriate defendants.

Legislative Analyst: Eleni Lionas

⁴ "Why Youth Incarceration Fails", The Sentencing Project.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/> Retrieved 4-23-25.

⁵ Baron, J.B., Jacob, B. & Ryan, J.P., "Pretrial Juvenile Detention" March 2022.

⁶ "Early Access to Legal Counsel Can Improve Outcomes for Youth". NORC at the University of Chicago, <https://www.norc.uchicago.edu/research/library/early-access-legal-counsel-can-improve-outcomes-youth.html> Retrieved 4-23-25.

⁷ Abrams, Z., "The psychological Science of Adolescent Behavior and Decision-Making is Reshaping the Juvenile Justice System" P. 48, November 2022.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have a significant, negative fiscal impact on LARA and an indeterminate fiscal impact on local units of government. The costs to LARA would be spent by the MIDC.

Currently, the formula used to calculate each adult indigent defense system's local share is based on each individual system's average annual expenditure on indigent defense services in the three fiscal years prior to July 2013, minus any funds reimbursed to the systems by indigent defendants. Under the bill, this formula would also include the average annual expenditure for indigent youth defense services in the three fiscal years immediately preceding the fiscal year in which the bill became law. If the CPI increased in the prior State fiscal year, the figure is adjusted by that number or 3%, whichever is less.

Based on the time that was required to develop standards and implement the grants program for adult indigent defense standards, the MIDC estimates that appropriations for juvenile justice services compliance would not be required for several fiscal years, likely in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27 or FY 2027-28.

The bill would add new language requiring the first grant installment paid to a system to be equal to 40% of its total award. The three subsequent payments would each be equal to 20% of the total. Payment of these installments would depend on the MIDC's review of the system's submitted documentation. The system would need to have spent at least 25% of its total plan and cost analysis in the prior quarter, although a system would be able to request an exemption if special circumstances delayed or prevented expenditures.

The MIDC estimates that it would require an additional 6.0 full-time equivalents (FTE) to undertake research, standard development, and grants planning beginning in FY 2025-26. This would include two staff for research and grant specialization as well as four field attorneys. Six FTEs would require an additional annual appropriation of approximately \$833,400, based on the average FTE cost of \$138,900 per year.

The cost to the State of funding future juvenile justice services compliance grants is unknown. The MIDC has estimated that the total costs would equal approximately 60% of the current adult costs, inclusive of the local share; however, this number could vary significantly depending on the adopted standards and the individual characteristics of the local juvenile justice systems that would have to reach compliance.

The specific costs of each system's local share would depend on their expenditures on indigent youth defense services in the three fiscal years prior to the fiscal year the bill passed. After the initial year of grant funding, this figure would be adjusted by the previous fiscal year's CPI increase or 3%, whichever was less.

Fiscal Analyst: Nathan Leaman
Michael Siracuse

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.