



Over the next few months, men and women seeking election to the Michigan House of Representatives will very likely contact you, asking for your vote. They are interested in what you have to say and the issues that are important to you. This provides you with the perfect opportunity to discuss issues of fairness, equality and reform in Michigan's public defense system.

Below, you will find nine simple questions you can choose from to ask candidates who knock on your door or see you at public forums or at campaign events. The purpose of asking these questions is not only to learn where they stand, but to help facilitate a polite discussion that will allow you to educate the next generation of legislative leaders on this critical issue! Our goal is not to confront these candidates in a negative or aggressive way. We want to bring this important issue to their attention so they are better prepared to tackle reform should they assume office in January 2009.

Thank you, again, for all you continue to do to ensure that every Michigan family has a voice in our criminal justice system.

---

## **Simple questions to ask candidates who want to be your State Representative!**

- I recently read a report that indicated Michigan's public defense system has been singled out as one of the worst in the nation, and I am sick and tired of hearing Michigan is at the bottom of these lists. This list seems even worse, since public defense is a Constitutional right. Is this an issue you are focusing on or something you're hoping to change?
- How important to you is rooting out inefficiencies in government and saving taxpayers money? I just heard about a series of wrongful convictions that occurred because innocent men were denied an adequate public defense. (Eddie Joe Lloyd, Ken Wyniemko and Walter Swift) That wound up costing the state millions of dollars and the worst part is it seems like it was entirely preventable.
- A recent study indicates that Michigan ranks 44<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states in per capita public defense funding, and that has contributed to a series of wrongful convictions. We only spend 38 percent of the national average to ensure our residents receive their basic constitutional rights, and we are one of the states with the highest amount of spending on our prison system – well over two billion dollars. Doesn't it seem like we should fix that problem?
- I'm worried about the number of wrongful convictions I've been reading about recently. It seems like we're cutting corners with public defense and sending the wrong people to prison while the real criminals are out roaming our streets. If you are elected to serve, will you promise to do something about a failing public defender system that continues to put speed over public safety?
- In Michigan, we seem to rush through court cases and wind up generating costly errors and inappropriate sentences, wasting a lot of money on wrongful convictions the lawsuits that follow, and corrections costs. How seriously will you look at that sort of fiscal irresponsibility?
- I'm not asking you to make any big promises, but if you are elected to serve would you be willing to hold hearings with policy makers and state experts on public defense, to take a look at how we can ensure an effective legal defense to all Michigan residents? We need to be sure that we are putting the right people in prison for the right crime, for the right amount of time.
- Are you familiar with the recent in-depth study on the protection of basic Constitutional rights here in Michigan done by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association?
- I'm tired of hearing about the state legislature placing all sorts of burdens onto the cities and counties. Public defense services, for example, are the state's Constitutional responsibility, but the state has shifted it completely onto the 83 individual counties. So, depending on where you live, you might get a completely different level of service. Can we do anything about that?
- If and when you are elected, would you be willing to meet with me, and others who know this issue is important, to discuss it more?

###