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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Ending “school to prison pipeline” is goal of Michigan anti-truancy summit

ANN ARBOR, MI, October 1, 2013 – Kids who skip or are ousted from school for bad behavior are at risk of dropping out and entering the “school to prison pipeline.” Efforts to find solutions to school truancy – and keep kids from lives of crime – got a boost at the recent “Michigan Leadership Summit on School-Justice Partnerships: Keeping Kids in School and Out of the Justice System.”

With the theme of “Justice. School. For All.”, the September 19-20 summit focused on ways to keep young people in school.

Governor Rick Snyder, in a message to the participants, said “When we increase school attendance, when we lower truancy and absenteeism, and when we see fewer kids on the street, it improves the quality of life for all of us. We will see fewer adults behind bars, fewer people in need of public assistance, and a safer, better educated, and more prosperous Michigan as a result.”

“Anyone who works in the juvenile justice system knows that kids who are suspended or expelled are much more likely to drop out altogether,” said Midland Probate Judge Dorene S. Allen, who also served as Chair of the Summit. “And when kids drop out of school, the likelihood that they’ll become involved in some kind of criminal activity increases dramatically. In fact, this phenomenon is so common, it’s come to be known as the ‘school to prison pipeline.’ The statistics are chilling: of Michigan prisoners, 49 percent do not have a high school degree or GED.”

The two-day summit, convened in Ann Arbor, Michigan, involved a wide array of experts on juvenile justice and truancy: juvenile judges, intermediate school district superintendents, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, and community mental health workers. Seventy-three county teams heard from national and state speakers, including Governor Rick Snyder, Michigan Supreme Court Justice Mary Beth Kelly, Department of Human Services Director Maura Corrigan, and Department of Education Superintendent Mike Flanagan. Also attending was Michigan Supreme Court Justice Bridget M. McCormack.

Allen said that school “Zero Tolerance” policies, which mandate suspending or expelling students, often have unintended consequences. “When children are expelled or suspended, they disproportionately end up in the criminal justice system,” the judge said.

The 73 county teams worked on their own solutions, using data and information from the summit presenters. Some county teams had as many as 10 members in attendance, Allen noted.

“There was an extraordinary level of collaboration within the county teams and throughout the state,” Allen said. “This is the first step of a three-year implementation of truancy priorities. In Michigan, it is clear that we have to keep kids in school and out of the judicial system: we need to stop the School to Prison pipeline.”

Michigan is the first state to hold a statewide summit on truancy issues.

The summit was endorsed and supported by the University of Michigan schools of law, social work, and education, and the provost office. Also involved were the Governor’s Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, the Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice, Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Human Services, Michigan Supreme Court State Court Administrative Office and the Casey Family Foundation.

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