



State Appellate Defender Office

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Mandatory life without parole sentences for young people under 19 are unconstitutional:

- Decisions from the United States and Michigan Supreme Courts require resentencing of young people under nineteen-years-old, who are serving mandatory sentences of life without parole. The sentences are unconstitutional, cruel and/or unusual punishment. [Montgomery v Louisiana](#), [People v Parks](#).
- SADO's Juvenile Lifer Unit represents 193 of Michigan's 364 juvenile lifers. The recent [expansion](#) by the Michigan Supreme Court to eighteen-year-old youth could mean an additional 274 people need new sentencing hearings.
- Michigan lags far [behind](#) the rest of the country. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia ban juvenile life without parole, and seven more states have no juveniles serving life without parole sentences. On March 18, 2023, New Mexico became the latest state to abolish this sentence.

Snapshot of Results: After years of litigation, life without parole results are extremely rare

- SADO represented 159 people who have been resentenced to term of years sentences, which make them parole eligible. 78 people have been released on parole or discharged from the Michigan Department of Corrections. Including new appeals, 25 people now await new sentencing hearings.
- There have been 38 contested hearings for SADO clients. 29 have resulted in term of years sentences, and eight resulted in a life without parole sentence. Appellate courts reversed four of the life without parole sentences, and more reversals likely.
- SADO attorneys have successfully advocated for reversal of ten life without parole sentences due to legal error in the first resentencing hearing.
- Life without parole sentences will be even rarer after the Michigan Supreme Court's recent [decision](#) placing the burden on prosecutors to prove by clear and convincing evidence that sentencing a young person to die in prison is a constitutional sentence.

People released have succeeded

- Of about 200 people released, only two have reoffended. This matches a Montclair State University [study](#) finding a recidivism rate of 1.14% in Philadelphia. These numbers fall far below Michigan's standard recidivism rate of [23.6%](#).
- [Triumph Reports](#) written by a person formerly serving life without parole and funded for a fellowship at SADO by the Michigan Justice Fund detail the successes of people represented by SADO.