FISCAL SNAPSHOT

STATE APPELLATE DEFENDER OFFICE – JUVENILE LIFE RESENTENCING

Date: February 2026 **Analyst: Robin R. Risko**

Summary

Michigan has the highest juvenile lifer population in the United States. For a long time, under statute, anyone convicted of first degree murder faced a sentence of life without parole, regardless of age. Resentencing hearings are now taking place for people as a result of U.S. and Michigan Supreme and appellate court rulings. The only issue reviewed is the sentence, not the conviction. The resentencing process involves prosecutors deciding whether to seek life without parole or agreeing to a term of years. Prosecutors must provide clear and convincing evidence to justify a life without parole sentence. Factors including the level of maturity, family environment, and potential for rehabilitation are required to be considered during resentencing hearings.

Background

In 2016, the United States Supreme Court ruled that imposing mandatory life sentences without the possibility of parole for people under the age of 18 was in violation of the United States Constitution (*Miller v Alabama* and *Montgomery v Louisiana*). Subsequent Michigan Supreme Court rulings require courts to resentence people who were sentenced to life without parole for crimes they committed at ages 20 and under (*People v Parks*, *People v Poole*, *People v Czarnecki,* and *People v Taylor*). It is argued that neurological development and culpability do not significantly differ between people aged 18 and people aged 19 or 20. Also, it is argued that people in this age group struggle with self-control and decision-making because their brains are not fully developed until age 25.

Recent Activity

The Michigan State Appellate Defender Office (SADO) represented 200 people in resentencing hearings under the *Miller* and *Montgomery* cases, represented 165 people under the *Parks* and *Poole* cases, and is estimated to represent at least an additional 150 people under the *Czarnecki* and *Taylor* cases. To date, the legislature has appropriated a total of $16.8 million in state funds to SADO to fulfil the right to counsel for unconstitutional life without parole resentencings. SADO has hired a total of 32.5 staff (29.5 are responsible for the work involved in juvenile life resentencing hearings and 3.0 are staff supporting the roster). It is estimated that SADO will require an additional $2.2 million and 13.5 staff positions to complete resentencing activities stemming from these recent court decisions.

	***Miller* (2012) & *Montgomery* (2016) 17 years old and under**	***Parks* (2022) & *Poole* (2025) 18 years old**	***Czarnecki* & *Taylor* (2025) 19 and 20 years old**
Offenders in MI entitled to resentencing	**365**	**275**	**582**
Offenders represented by SADO	**200**	**165**	**est. 150**
State funds appropriated to SADO	**$5,985,800 from 2016 to 2023**	**$5,423,800 from 2024 to 2025**	**$5,380,800 in 2026**
Employees hired for resentencing hearings	**11.0**	**7.5**	**14.0**
Total employees in Juvenile Lifer Unit	**11.0**	**18.5**	**32.5**
Resentencings remaining	**8**	**110**	**TBD**

**The number of offenders entitled to resentencing for other lifer-adjacent cases is not captured in this table.*