



Middlesex County District Attorney 2026

The District Attorney is the chief law enforcement officer in Middlesex County. Their decisions determine whether young adults (ages 18 to 25) caught up in the court system are sent straight to adult prison or offered a second chance through job training, mental health care, and community supervision.

In this forum, young leaders from UTEC and More Than Words asked candidates how they plan to make local justice fair, effective, and safe.

Five Key Issues Covered in the Full Transcript:

- **Mental Health & Support for Young Adults:** Expanding clinic services and family support so 18-to-25-year-olds do not fall through the cracks after aging out of youth programs.
- **"Raise the Age" in Court:** Moving 18- and 19-year-olds from adult criminal courts into juvenile courts to lower repeat offenses while monitoring court capacity.
- **Listening to Impacted Youth:** Setting up a regular advisory council of young people who have lived experience in the justice system to help guide county policies.
- **Second Chances for Serious Charges:** Expanding pre-trial diversion and opening specialized Young Adult Courts to handle high-need cases outside of standard prison pipelines.
- **Fairness & Public Data:** Publishing case data online and reviewing charging decisions to ensure fair treatment regardless of race or income.

Please note that the Both Democratic candidates for Middlesex District Attorney, Marian T. Ryan and David Marc Solet, received the same six questions in advance and were invited to record video responses. Ryan participated in the forum and submitted responses. Solet declined to respond.

For candidate statements and complete policy positions, read the full question-and-answer transcript below:

Youth-Led Video Voter Series

OPENING - Mickey - UTEC

Hello. Welcome to the Middlesex County District Attorney 2026 Youth-Led Video Voter Series hosted by UTEC and More Than Words. We are young adults who have lived and are still experiencing tough times with the justice system, in and out of foster care, struggling with

homelessness, and fear violence every day. Besides the nightmares, we are also growing students, social enterprise workers, and strong young civic activists who are tired of the repeating cycle of new change. We want to be the voice of the new change we deserve today, and make sure it remains a safe and supportive environment for all generations in all our own diverse communities.

The district attorney office has incredible power over young people in our communities. Essentially, they set policy that determines who gets diverted into supportive programming and who gets funneled into adult prisons. That's why we build a series putting questions together, covering topics like age limits, diversity options, social justice.

Each candidate was given the same question and has one to two minutes to respond. As you listen to their answers, remember that staying informed is essential to holding elected leaders accountable. For more information, go to www.voteinma.com.

Thank you so much, and here's your first question.

QUESTION 1 — EMERGING ADULT JUSTICE PRIORITIES

JAYDEN — MORE THAN WORDS

Hey y'all, it's Jayden Hernandez here, and I'm representing More Than Words, and we would like to know more about your priorities related to the emerging adult justice system. And if elected, what's one thing you would change about how young people are treated in the justice system?

CANDIDATE RESPONSE: Marian Ryan

I think that what's important is that we have more of a focus on what a unique category emerging adults fall into. We have the brain science research that tells us about people are not in that age range quite in the same place as adults with respect to their judgment, but also they have aged out of a lot of services.

So, for instance, a great example is in the juvenile court. We have the juvenile court clinic, which is a great resource for us. Probably is where 95% of our cases we begin with input from the court clinic. We don't have a similar kind of clinic for young adults.

We in the juvenile court have the opportunity to have a lot of parental or family supports. We don't have that same thing necessarily in dealing with emerging adults, and we especially don't have enough accessible, affordable mental health services, or the kinds of services that we like to use in doing individualized diversion or accountability plans.

So I would like us to really take a much broader look at what are the needs of young adults, and how could we more closely meet those needs by having services that are specifically tailored.

QUESTION 2 — RAISE THE AGE

JAYDEN - MORE THAN WORDS

Given the difference in the outcomes and recidivism rates for youth coming out of the adult prisons versus the juvenile system, do you support raising the age of the juvenile court jurisdiction and endorse the current Raise the Age legislation? And if so, how would you use your platform in office to advance and enforce this bill?

CANDIDATE RESPONSE: Marian Ryan

I support raising the age for 18 and 19 year olds, and I think that would be a good way to begin because I support the concept. We've heard lots of information. I had the opportunity to serve on the commission on this issue, and we've heard a lot about how it might overwhelm the court.

I think it's always good to begin these changes in a thoughtful, measured manner. See how those changes are going, then make accommodations if we need to, and if they're going well, continue to expand.

QUESTION 3 — EMERGING ADULT ADVISORY COUNCIL

JOHAYRO - UTEC

Will you agree to create and sustain an emerging adult advisory council meeting about three times a year with those participating from More Than Words UTEC or other emerging adults impacted by the justice system? Yes or no? Why or why not?

CANDIDATE RESPONSE: Marian Ryan

I would support the creation and would work with such a council. We've taken that approach before in this county.

When we began our work on opioids, we first created a mobile policy forum formed with people who had lived experience with addiction and recovery, learned an incredible amount, and really taking the view of many of the folks we've worked closely on immigration issues.

There should be nothing about people without them being involved in it. So yes, I support and would participate in such a council.

QUESTION 4 — DIVERSION FOR FELONY AND VIOLENCE-RELATED CHARGES

MICKEY - UTEC

Can you support diversion or establishing young adults, or for emerging adults facing felony and violence-related charges, not just misdemeanors? Yes or no? Why or why not?

CANDIDATE RESPONSE: Marian Ryan

Yes, I not only would, but I do. We have a very robust diversion currently, both for juveniles and for young adults up until the age of 26, that program has been functioning in some way for about 20 years.

Our young adult diversion program is now 10 years old, and I certainly do support the young adult court. In fact, we have just signed a memorandum of understanding with the trial court, and we will be bringing two young adult courts to Middletown as quickly as the trial court can roll that out.

QUESTION 5 — EQUITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

JOHAYRO - UTEC

How would you ensure that people facing criminal charges see fair and equitable treatment regardless of their race, income, neighborhood, mental health, mobility, status, or access to legal resources. And what would accountability look like for your office if disparities persist?

CANDIDATE RESPONSE: Marian Ryan

You know, our programs around older juveniles and young adults have really been in place now for almost 20 years. It's been 10 years since I expanded our young adult diversion program to include individuals up to the age of 26.

We have also invested a lot of resources in really developing an incredibly dedicated staff who work on these cases, who are very focused on taking a global view, trying to change the trajectory of someone's life, looking at what got them into the criminal justice system and how we could help them avoid coming back into the system.

So I think there's a very good job that we are doing in terms of looking at people individually, but I also believe that people shouldn't just have to rely on what we say. They should be able to look at the data. We want to be accountable.

That's why, if you go to our website, you'll see that we collect 62 points of data from all of our cases, measuring outcomes, measuring charges, and laying that against characteristics of individuals, where they come from, how old they are, racial identity—all of those pieces.

So I think we both do the work up front in training people to be better equipped to handle these cases, and then we check our work by gathering and publishing the data about where our cases are.

And obviously, as we do that and we look at that data, it gives us the opportunity to intervene if we see something that seems inconsistent or doesn't make sense.

I've also brought into our office a first of its kind director of racial justice initiatives, and a part of that director's role is also looking at how we are approaching cases across the office of all ages, but are we being equitable in what we are doing with cases?

CLOSING

YOUNG ADULT SPEAKER

On behalf of More Than Words and UTEC, thank you for watching our Middlesex District Attorney Voter Series, and thank you to all the candidates who took the time to answer questions from young people in the community.

We hope these conversations help you learn more about the candidates, the issues that matter, and the choices you'll have at the ballot box.

For information about registering to vote, where to vote, and upcoming elections, visit the Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth's election website.

Most importantly, stay informed, make your voice heard, and remember, your voice matters.

Thank you.