

Juvenile Justice Initiative

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February 7, 2007

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New Poll Shows Public Strongly Favors Rehabilitation for Youth

Public rejects placing youth in adult jails, prosecuting youth as adults

Springfield, Illinois –A new poll by Zogby International, and commissioned by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) shows that the public is concerned about youth crime, but strongly supports rehabilitation and treatment, not prosecution in the adult court or incarceration in adult jails or prisons. The NCCD is the oldest criminal justice research organization in the United States. Major findings from the survey of likely voters included:

- 9 out of 10 people polled believe that rehabilitation and treatment for incarcerated youth can help prevent future crime, and 8 out of 10 thought spending money on rehabilitative services and treatment for youth will save money in the long run.
- 7 out of 10 of those polled felt that putting young people (under age 18) in an adult correctional facility will make them more likely to commit future crime. More than two-thirds (68 percent) disagreed that incarcerating youth in adult facilities “teaches them a lesson and deters them from committing future crimes.”
- By more than a 15 to 1 margin (92 percent to 6 percent), those polled believe that the decision to transfer youth to adult court should be made on a case-by-case basis. Thousands of young people end up automatically transferred to the adult system, either by a prosecutor, because of the crime, or because in their state, young people are automatically considered adults by courts.

The survey findings on public views is consistent with research commissioned by the U.S. Justice Department that showed that sending young people to prison may in fact actually *increase* crime and recidivism.

“These results show that the public strongly favors rehabilitation and treatment over incarceration,” says Terry Carmichael, Chairman of the Juvenile Justice Initiative. “The public strongly believes that placing youth in adult jails and prisons will not rehabilitate youth or deter future crime.”

The survey was conducted in January, 2007 using a national sample of likely voters and utilizing methodology approved by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. Likely voters were polled on their views on whether prosecuting youth in

adult court and placing youth in adult jails and prisons were effective ways to deter crime, and on their views on other public safety approaches. The poll comes as a number of states, including Illinois, Connecticut, North Carolina, and Wisconsin are considering proposals to reduce the number of youth automatically tried as adults.

“Most states try youth age 17 in juvenile court. However, in over a dozen states including Illinois, all youth age 17 charged with an offense, are prosecuted in adult court, no matter how minor the offense,” says Betsy Clarke, President of the Juvenile Justice Initiative. “This poll reveals the public does not support trying youth under 18 in adult court or holding them in adult jails.”

While young people tried and sentenced in the adult court will receive an adult record, and can lose access to student financial aid, and their right to vote because of an adult conviction, the poll showed that 66 percent of those polled said it was “unacceptable” that a criminal conviction should negatively affect their future opportunities for jobs and education.

“Placing youth in adult jails is no way to solve juvenile crime,” said Clarke, “that is the reason that we support new legislation that will increase the age of jurisdiction for the Juvenile Court.” In Illinois, current law says that a 17 year-old is automatically considered an adult in the justice system. Thirty-seven other states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government use the age of 18 as the age of adult criminal jurisdiction. Over the past two years, legislation increasing the age of jurisdiction has passed the Illinois House and Senate but under separate bills. A bill to increase the age to 18 is expected to be introduced in the Illinois General Assembly within the next few days.

“Seventeen year-old youth are still in high school, cannot vote, and cannot sign contracts, and yet Illinois law does not allow them to receive the benefits of juvenile court services no matter how minor the offense,” said Clarke. “This poll shows that people want kids held accountable and want them to receive services, not be saddled for life with an adult record,” said Carmichael.

The poll can be found at: <http://www.nccd-crc.org/>

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