

ISSUE BRIEF *Juvenile Justice Youth: A Closer Look*



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According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 120,000 youth under the age of 18 are currently incarcerated in juvenile detention centers, state prisons, and local jails. Currently 2 million people are incarcerated at an average annual cost of \$20,000 per inmate – for a total cost of \$40 billion per year. ¹

Each year there are more than 600,000 admissions to secure detention facilities. According to recent federal statistics, there are approximately 27,000 youth in these institutions on any given day, an increase of almost 100 percent since 1985. ²

Fewer than one-third are charged with offenses involving violence. More than one-third are detained for status offenses (non-criminal offenses such as running away) and various technical violations of probation and other rules. ³

The Waxman/Collins report to Congress <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov> concludes that two-thirds of juvenile detention facilities nationwide are holding young people with serious mental health problems, some as young as seven, who have committed no crime but are detained because there are no mental health facilities available for them. ⁴

Approximately two-thirds of detained youth are minority youth, and virtually all of the growth in detention over the past 15 years is due to greatly increased rates of detention for African Americans and Latinos. ⁵

One-half to three-fourths of incarcerated youth nationwide are estimated to suffer from a mental health disorder. Suicide within juvenile detention and correctional facilities is more than four times greater than in the general population. Appropriate assessment and treatment services for confined youth with mental health problems are seriously inadequate. ⁶

It is estimated that more than half of all detained youth have drug use problems that require substance abuse treatment, yet relatively few facilities provide such services. One study found that treatment for adolescent substance offenders was available in less than 40 percent of the nation's public and private youth facilities. ⁷

Studies indicate that although 10 percent to 12 percent of the general population suffers from learning disabilities, rates are as high as 42 percent among the correctional population. Numerous studies point to recidivism rates of 50 percent to 75 percent. ⁸

Helpful Links

Mental Health Needs of Youth and Young Offenders

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice provides a quick overview of the key facts and key recommendations.

<http://www.juvjustice.org/resources/fs002.html>

Incarceration of Youth who are Waiting for Community Mental Health Services in the United States

Based on 2003 data, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform wrote a July 2004 report that documented the widespread use of juvenile detention facilities to house youth waiting for community mental health services.

<http://democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20040817121901-25170.pdf>

Criminal Neglect: Substance Abuse, Juvenile Justice and the Children Left Behind

The National Center on Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that of the 2.4 million juvenile arrests in 2000, 1.9 million involved substance abuse and addiction but that only 68,600 of those arrested received any substance abuse treatment. The report suggests modifications that would improve the way the nation treats juvenile offenders and ultimately result in fewer juvenile substance abusers and addicts.

Press release:

<http://66.135.34.236/absolutenm/templates/PressReleases.asp?articleid=385&zoneid=61>

1 Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/>

5 Kids Count Data Book 2004-p.9

6 Ibid

7 Zeidenberg, J. and B. Holman, "The Dangers of Detention," 2004, The Justice Policy Institute, Washington, DC

8 Ibid