



Key Facts: Jailing Juveniles

The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America

The new report, “Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America,” released on November 15, 2007 by the Campaign for Youth Justice, shows that thousands of youth are in adult jails and are not covered by federal protections originally designed to keep youth out of adult jails.

- Every day in America, an average of 7,500 youth are incarcerated in adult jails.
- The number of youth who are placed in adult jails every year *could be even higher* – tens of thousands of young people according to some researchers – to account for the ‘turnover’ in adult jails.
- As many as one-half of these youth will be sent back to the juvenile justice system or not be convicted. Yet, most of these youth will have spent *at least one month* in an adult jail and one in five of these youth will have spent *over six months* in an adult jail.
- It is extremely difficult to keep children safe in adult jails. When youth are placed with adults in adult jails, youth are at risk of physical and sexual assault. According to BJS, 21% and 13% of all substantiated victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence in jails in 2005 and 2006 respectively, were youth under the age of 18 (surprisingly high since only 1% of jail inmates are juveniles).
- Some jailers will separate children from adults but this is not adequate either. While separating children from adults in adult jails will reduce contact with adults that could result in physical or emotional harm to children, children are then often placed in isolation. Youth are frequently locked down 23 hours a day in small cells with no natural light. These conditions can cause anxiety, paranoia, and exacerbate existing mental disorders and put youth at risk of suicide. Youth have the highest suicide rates of all inmates in jails. Youth are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile detention facility, and 19 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than youth in the general population.
- Jails are simply not equipped to protect youth from the dangers of adult jails. Nor do jails have the capacity to provide necessary educational or other services.
- This policy does not increase public safety or reduce crime. New scientific evidence shows that placing youth in the adult criminal justice system increases their likelihood of re-offending. Physicians and criminologists agree that children who are prosecuted in adult court are more likely to be re-arrested more often and more quickly for serious offenses.
- It's now time to update the federal and state laws to reflect this new research.
- Federal law put into place over three decades ago was actually designed to address this problem. The original intent of the federal law, the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) was to remove youth from adult jails altogether.
- There is a loophole – the law doesn't apply to youth who are not under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.
- Congress could easily fix this problem. Congress could extend the protections of the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) that disallow the placement of children in adult jails to protect all children, no matter what court they are in.

REPORT AVAILABLE ONLINE AT: http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/national_reports.html