



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY
YOUTH
ADVOCATES

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**Kentucky Can Save Money And Improve Outcomes For Youth
By Investing In Alternatives To Secure Detention**

Louisville, KY – Kentucky can save money and prevent crime by placing young people who commit status offenses in proven alternatives to detention, according to an issue brief released today by Kentucky Youth Advocates.

Status offenses are acts that are considered illegal if committed by someone under 18 and include habitual truancy, failing to follow directives of parents or schools, running away, and purchasing or attempting to purchase tobacco or alcohol.

These non-violent acts pose little to no threat to the community, yet Kentucky youth who engage in these troublesome behaviors are detained in secure facilities at the second highest rate in the nation. In 2007, 2,340 youth in the Commonwealth were detained for committing status offenses.

“We need to rethink the frequency with which we use secure detention as a solution for the troublesome behaviors of our youth. Kentucky can both help kids and save money if it shifts resources towards alternatives to detention. This is one of those rarest of situations -- the policies that best serve young people also best serve the budget’s bottom line,” said Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates.

“It is imperative that we invest in prevention and rehabilitative supports. To cut these programs costs real dollars today and sets up future scenarios where corrections will continue to drain the state coffers,” Brooks said.

The brief finds that secure detention for youth who commit status offenses is not only the most expensive approach -- exceeding the price of emergency shelter care, supervised foster care, and home detention -- but it is also the least effective. Research shows that incarceration is the most

significant factor in increasing the odds that a child will repeat their offending behavior. There are typically underlying issues causing a child to misbehave, and because detention does not provide the opportunity for that child to rehabilitate, the behavior will more than likely continue, research has found.

“Status offenses are non-violent acts and would not even be a crime if a youth were over the age of 18,” Brooks said. “Yet, secure detention at juvenile justice facilities does not differentiate based on type of offense, meaning that we house youth who commit status offenses alongside youth who have been charged with true crimes. The research is clear that putting youth who commit status offenses into this environment increases their odds of engaging in criminal activity somewhere down the road.”

There are cost-effective alternatives that are proven to address the factors that lead a child to commit a status offense and reduce the chances of a further offense. Kentucky already utilizes a number of effective approaches ranging from working preventatively with youth before they are sent to the juvenile justice system to helping youth already charged with offenses address the underlying problems at home or school. For instance, the Truancy Diversion Program, administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts, gives youth who habitually miss school the opportunity to make up for their offense without court action. This program has been successful for 92 percent of participating youth, yet the program only exists in 51 of Kentucky’s 120 counties.

“Some adolescents *will* engage in behavior that is undesirable, but we owe it to them and to the future viability of the state to ensure they have the opportunity to become productive citizens,” Brooks said. “Kentucky can build on the successful alternatives already in place and make them available to all kids in the Commonwealth. Alternatives increase their chance of successfully transitioning into adulthood and save our state money in the long run.”

Because Kentucky is in the midst of a \$996 million budget shortfall, tough decisions on how to use limited state resources must be made in an upcoming special legislative session to balance the state’s budget. Juvenile justice programs were already cut in last year’s budget-balancing measures and are extremely likely to receive another round of cuts because Gov. Steve Beshear did not protect them in his proposal to balance the budget.

Brooks adds: “If we are not very careful, budget decisions that slash juvenile justice will epitomize being penny-wise and pound foolish.”

Find a complete copy of the issue brief, ***Reducing the Use of Detention for Status Offenses in Kentucky*** on Kentucky Youth Advocates’ website at www.kyyouth.org.

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Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.