



Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

MEDIA ADVISORY

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New Juvenile Justice Policies Can Make Arizona Safer

Children's Action Alliance releases latest research on best juvenile justice policies and practices

(Phoenix, AZ) If you did something that you thought would improve safety and you found out it actually increased danger, would you change it? That's the question Arizona and many other states are facing today regarding policies that prosecute youth in the adult criminal justice system.

Children's Action Alliance today released a new report, *Improving Public Safety by Keeping Youth Out of the Adult Criminal Justice System*, which documents recent research showing that Arizona youth and communities are safer by keeping more youth in the juvenile justice system.

Independent reviews of multiple research studies completed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention in the U.S. Department of Justice under President George W. Bush came to the same conclusion: transferring youth to the adult criminal system results in greater youth crime, including violent crime.

"The evidence is strong and clear," said Dana Wolfe Naimark, President and CEO of Children's Action Alliance. "Prosecuting youth as if they were adults makes it less likely that they will be rehabilitated and become productive members of society. That means we're not getting the results we expect from our policies and our tax dollars."

The report includes ten policy recommendations to strengthen the decision-making process, reduce recidivism, save unnecessary expenses, and lead to more youth becoming law-abiding, productive citizens.

In 1996, Arizona voters passed a ballot initiative amending the state constitution to require automatic adult prosecution for children fifteen years old and older if they were charged with certain violent crimes or if they had a certain history. The following year, the state legislature passed a law that allowed more youth into the adult system. The legislature also gave county attorneys the sole power to decide to prosecute many more children as adults -- children as young as 14 accused of a wider variety of crimes, including non-violent offenses.

As a result, thousands of children in Arizona have been shut out of rehabilitation in the juvenile justice system in the past decade. In 2009 alone, there were over 600 youth prosecuted as adults. More than one quarter (29%) of these youth were not charged with violent offenses, but were charged with property or misdemeanor crimes. More than one-third (37%) of the youth were charged at the sole discretion of the prosecutor. Less than 10% of youth were transferred to adult court after a hearing in which a juvenile court judge had the opportunity to examine all of the circumstances in the case.

Since the change in Arizona law, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized in two cases - *Roper V. Simmons* (2005) and *Graham v. Florida* (2010) – that the immature emotional and physical development of youth diminishes their legal culpability for their actions.

"The more we know about adolescent brain development, the more we understand why the threat of putting kids into adult systems does nothing to deter crime," said J. Michael Traher, Jr., Attorney. "The part of the brain that governs reasoning and planning develops last so teenagers don't have full capacity to weigh consequences before they act. The vast majority of youth stop any criminal behavior as they mature, so locking them up with adult criminals does far more harm than good."

The Executive Summary or the full report can be downloaded from the "What's New" Section on the CAA website (www.azchildren.org).

Children's Action Alliance is an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works to improve children's health, education, and security through information and action. www.azchildren.org

Get more juvenile justice data from the KIDS COUNT Data Center at: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>

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