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Michigan must change youthful offender stance

Michigan locks up delinquent youths at a higher rate than most states, even as evidence shows there are better, more cost-effective ways to deal with troubled teens.

A panel of juvenile justice experts spoke at a Capitol press conference earlier this month about the release of the "2008 Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being" by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Michigan was 33rd (with No. 1 being the best) among the states when it comes to the rate of keeping youths in custody, according to the report. There are 137 youths in custody for every 100,000 Michigan youths ages 10-15. That compares with a national rate of 125 per 100,000. In addition, the rate of minority youth in custody is triple the rate of white youth in Michigan.

More than 300 inmates who committed crimes as juveniles are serving life sentences with no possibility of parole, she said, and she called upon lawmakers to pass legislation prohibiting life without parole for crimes committed by juveniles.

The study of juvenile justice was the special focus on this year's national report, which ranks states on 10 measures of child well-being. Michigan ranked 27th..

Kids Count in Michigan is a collaboration of the Michigan League for Human Services, which researches and writes the state-level report, and Michigan's Children, which works with communities to bring attention to the Kids Count findings.

It is part of a national effort to measure the well-being of children at state and local levels.

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