

POLICY POSITION

25. Youth in Prisons

Background

There are over 50,000 residents of juvenile facilities. A significant relationship exists between the unmet needs of children and youth and the issues of crime and prison overcrowding; this relationship must be further understood and addressed before meaningful and far-reaching solutions may be found. Research and statistics point out several illustrations of this relationship:

- Most crimes are committed by individuals between 15 and 29 years of age.
- 35% of inner city boys have 1 police contact before their 18th birthday; 6% will have 5 or more arrests before their 18th birthday.
- Many individuals who commit violent crimes were abused as children.
- There is a correlation between delinquent behavior and unemployment, educational deficiencies, and learning disabilities.
- Major factors contributing to delinquent behavior include low income, low IQ, poor parental monitoring, expectation of low punishment, and delinquent peers.

For years, the issues of overwhelming crime, unsafe streets and prison overcrowding have been studied. However, much of the emphasis in solving these problems has focused on the adult correctional system. Also, short-term solutions, such as building more jails and prisons, finding alternatives to incarceration, and examining sentencing address these problems only to a limited extent. These solutions treat the symptoms of crime but not the causes. The only way to reduce the crime problem permanently is to examine and address the sociological forces that drive the population at risk (15-29 years old) toward criminal behavior.

Recommendation

The Southern Legislative Conference requests the Southern Legislator's Conference on Children and Youth to consider, investigate and make recommendations to the Southern Legislative Conference regarding the relationship between the unmet needs of children and youth and the issues of crime and prison overcrowding.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference on July 24, 1985.

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