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Report: Fewer Florida Youth Locked-up

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - Florida youths in trouble are spending less time in confinement and more time getting the help they need to get back on their feet.

The rate of confinement dropped by 32 percent from 1997 to 2010, according to [a new study from the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#). Still, the report said, close to 5,000 children were locked up in Florida in 2010, second-highest in the nation.

Susan Weitzel, director of Florida Kids Count, said it's important to look at the larger picture for a troubled child in deciding what's best.

"The crime is not what the focus should be on," she said. "The focus is really that the crime is simply an identification of underlying issues."

The report pointed out that a majority of the youth incarcerated are there for nonviolent offenses, such as parole violations or possession of alcohol. There are 21 juvenile detention centers in Florida.

According to the National Prisoner Statistics Program, on an average day in 2010 more than 7,000 juveniles were serving time in adult prisons, putting them at risk for physical harm.

While the report indicates a step in the right direction with lower incarceration rates, said Laura Speer, associate director of policy and research at the Casey Foundation, more work remains to be done.

"Compared with other countries that are similar to the United States," she said, "we still incarcerate our young people many times higher than other countries do. So there's a long way to go."

The number of Florida youths in confinement went down across all racial groups, but the report also cited racial and ethnic disparities. Nationwide, it noted, African-Americans are nearly five times more likely to be confined as are their white peers.

The study recommended continued use of rehabilitation programs, and changing state policies on incarcerating youths.

Florida receives recognition in the report for the education provided to juveniles while in custody.

The report, "Reducing Youth Incarceration in the United States," is online at [aecf.org](#).

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