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Study: Arresting youth for common misbehavior harms public safety

Stepping Up: Florida's Top Civil Citation Efforts shows three counties – Duval, Hillsborough, Orange – were responsible for nearly one-quarter of all statewide arrests.

TALLAHASSEE, FL— Florida's second annual comprehensive study of alternatives to juvenile arrests for common youth misbehavior – called "***Stepping Up: Florida's Top Juvenile Civil Citation Efforts 2016***" – shows counties that arresting youth rather than issue civil citations create more reoffenders who generate more crime, running counter to law enforcement's basic responsibility to reduce crime. Juvenile civil citations are an alternative to arrest for common youth misbehavior.

Authored by one of Florida's top juvenile civil citation experts and supported by state and national juvenile justice reform organizations, the study also shows increasing the use of civil citations statewide up to 75% would enable law & order entities to invest up to \$62 million in preventing and addressing felonies and serious crimes, as well as significantly improve life outcomes for nearly 7,000 arrested youth.

"This year's study supports – in more depth and with more data – last year's findings that civil citations increase public safety, improve youth outcomes and save taxpayer money," said study author Dewey Caruthers, president of dewey & associates. "We are unable to find any data that shows arresting youth for common youth misbehavior instead of issuing civil citations is a good idea," Caruthers said, noting the Stepping Up 2016 recommends law enforcement arrest only in rare and exceptional circumstances instead of issuing a civil citation.

Stepping Up 2016 also reveals three counties – Duval, Hillsborough, Orange – were responsible for 24% of all arrests (totaling nearly 3,000) for common youth misbehavior in FY 2014-2015.

The nonpartisan study is supported by The Children's Campaign, Southern Poverty Law Center, ACLU, Joseph W. & Terrell S. Clark, Jessie Ball duPont Fund, Florida State University Project on Accountable Justice, James Madison Institute and Florida PTA.

Stepping Up 2016 recognizes the state's top-performing counties, school districts and law enforcement agencies, which are categorized by division based on eligible youth. The top-performing counties include Baker, Bay, Broward, Dade, Lafayette, Leon, Pinellas, Seminole, Marion, Monroe, Nassau, Union, Wakulla.

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"These top-performing counties recognized by *Stepping Up 2016* are the best in the state at not arresting juveniles for common youth misbehavior," said Roy Miller, president of The Children's

Campaign, Florida's leading child advocacy organization for juvenile justice reform. "Without a doubt, arrests close doors to youth for future education and employment. We are calling on all counties, school districts and law enforcement agencies to get on board and dramatically increase utilization rates."

The study reports recidivism rates of juvenile civil citations compared to post-arrest diversions. "Arrests fare poorly regarding recidivism rates when compared directly to the utilization of civil citations," said Caruthers. For example, when comparing nine of the most common youth related offenses, arrests resulted in at least double the recidivism rate for seven of those offenses, according to Caruthers. Specifically, for vandalism, the civil citation recidivism rate is 3%, but it is 9% for post-arrest diversion; for marijuana possession, civil citation recidivism is 5%, but it is 10% for post-arrest; and for petit theft, recidivism is 3% and 7% respectively.

Stepping Up 2016 reveals Florida leads the nation in the prioritization of pre-arrest diversions to curb juvenile crime and reduce incarceration. The study ranks states by the strength of civil citation-related statutes and statewide civil citation data reporting. Arizona, Florida and Nebraska are identified as having the strongest state civil citation / prearrest diversion statutes; and Florida and Pennsylvania rated as having the strongest state data reporting. According to the study, statutes chart the state's path toward success with civil citation; and statewide data reporting is arguably the most important asset for a state to move toward utilizing civil citations / pre-arrest diversion.

"This provides data to support what we have heard anecdotally about Florida being a model for the nation with civil citation prearrest diversion," said Miller.

Stepping Up County Reports 2016, which provide reporting of the performance of each county, its school district and its law enforcement agencies, are available at www.iamforkids.org/civilcitationreport. Also included in the County Reports is the impact at that community level – increases in public safety resources and reductions of arrests – through increased utilization of civil citations.