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Greater use of juvenile civil citations sought

The News Service of Florida

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A coalition of groups released a report Wednesday that calls for an increased use of civil citations for juvenile offenders in Florida.

Civil citations serve as an alternative to arresting youths for incidents such as fighting, minor drug and alcohol offenses and petty theft. Instead of being arrested, the offenders are required to do such things as community service and writing letters of apology to their victims.

Although the use of civil citations has increased recently, about 12,000 Florida youths were arrested for those types of misdemeanors last year.

Children's advocates said a majority of the youths should have been instead given civil citations, as juvenile records can prevent young people from renting apartments, entering the military or getting jobs. The coalition of groups held a news conference Wednesday in Tallahassee to call for using more civil citations.

"We are not here today to pick a fight with law enforcement, but we are here to make a point," said Roy Miller, president The Children's Campaign. "The pilot project is in. The research is conclusive. Civil citations work better than arrests, and we need to get everybody on



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board."

Statewide, the diversion plans are used 42 percent of the time when they are an option. Of the 12,000 youth arrests for relatively minor offenses in Florida last year, almost one-quarter happened in Duval, Hillsborough and Orange counties.

"The alarming thing about this report is that there are still too many communities that are jeopardizing the future of young people by saddling them with an arrest record for a non-violent, minor offense," said Howard Simon, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida.

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