

Miller says Leon and Wakulla rank among the top 13 counties using civil citations as an alternative to arrest. He says violators get more than a ticket. They're required to do things like perform community service and write letters of apology.

Advocates insist civil citations save money because the kids who get them are less likely to commit more crimes than those who get arrested. Civil citation researcher Dewey Caruthers says the numbers prove it.

"For vandalism, the civil citation recidivism rate is three percent, and for post-arrest diversion it's nine percent...Triple the rate."

But lawmakers still aren't convinced. They beat back an attempt earlier this year to make civil citations mandatory for some crimes.

ACLU Florida chief Howard Simon says the report shows more reforms are needed. He says too many children are getting arrested for an infraction that would earn them a civil citation in a city a few miles down the road.

"You can't have a system in which things vary from county to county, from law enforcement agency to law enforcement agency, or from city to city. That is a prescription for unfairness."

The report recommends forcing police officers to provide a written justification and to get a supervisor's permission before arresting a juvenile for a minor offense.

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