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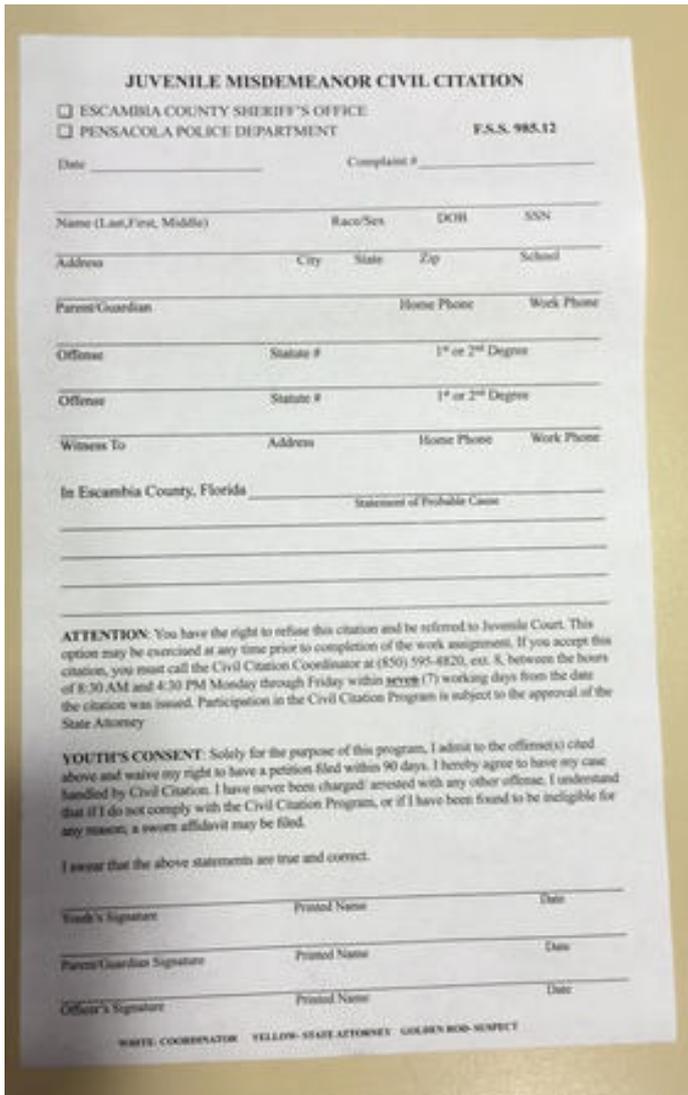
Advocates Say Civil Citations The Ticket To Lower Recidivism

By JIMASH • SEP 15, 2016

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Originally published on September 14, 2016 5:25 pm

Children’s advocates say civil citations are catching on, but too many young people are still being arrested for relatively minor crimes.



Civil citations spare juveniles an arrest record, but still require community service, written apologies and other forms of restitution.

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Backed by groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center and the American Civil Liberties Union, a study shows use of civil citations increased five percent in Florida last year.

But it also shows nearly 12 thousand juveniles were arrested for what advocates call “common youth misbehavior.” Children’s Campaign President Roy Miller says that’s far too many kids getting saddled with a criminal record for things like smoking marijuana, spray painting buildings or shop lifting.

“Results from the study clearly support a local, state and national call to action to do away with needless juvenile arrests which interfere with the lives of our children and their futures.”

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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