

By Jimmie Davis for [The Westside Gazette](#)

Part Two

If juvenile offenders didn't break the law then there would be no need for police, criminal lawyers, judges, the juvenile justice system and the detention centers that house perpetrators.

However, that's not the case because sending juveniles away to confinement doesn't work and the cyclical cycle of criminal activity continues upon their release. Juvenile detention facilities are dangerous, ineffective, unnecessary, obsolete, wasteful and inadequate says Mendel.

"We now have overwhelming evidence showing that wholesale incarceration of juvenile offenders is a counter-productive public policy," he wrote. "While a small number of youthful offenders pose a serious threat to the public and must be confined, incarcerating a broader swath of the juvenile offender population provides no benefit for public safety."

It wastes vast sums of taxpayer dollars. Senate Bill 1450 was enacted because schools were using Black children as "target practice" and suspending/expelling them for frivolous reasons.

The legislation requires school boards to revise their zero-tolerance policies to ensure that students expelled or referred to law enforcement pose a serious threat to school safety, and are not expelled or arrested for petty misconduct. DJJ determined that there was a much higher prominence of Black youth being charged with disorderly conduct and assault and battery compared to whites.

America's juvenile corrections institutions subject confined youth to intolerable levels of violence, abuse and other forms of maltreatment. There's widespread physical abuse and excessive use of force by facility staff.

Several months ago Eric Perez, 18, died at a West Palm Beach County juvenile lockup after his complaints of a severe headache, hallucinating, and vomiting fell on deaf ears. The Orlando Sun Sentinel reported “One of the most egregious child abusers in Florida is the very agency that’s supposed to rehabilitate troubled youths: the state Department of Juvenile Justice.

” The outcomes of correctional facilities are poor, and 70 to 80 percent of youth are rearrested within two or three years. A 2007 study in Florida involving 40,000 youthful offenders found that those assessed as low risk who were placed into residential facilities not only re-offended at a higher rate than similar youth who remained in the community, they also re-offended at a higher rate than high-risk youth placed into correctional facilities.

A substantial percentage of youth confined in juvenile corrections facilities pose minimal risk to public safety.

During 2008-2009 over half of the youth placed into Florida’s juvenile detention facilities [58 percent] were committed for misdemeanors or technical violations of probation – not felony offenses.

Only 13 percent were for serious violent crimes. “Programs offering counseling and treatment typically reduce recidivism,” the report stated.

“Those focusing on coercion and control tend to produce negative or null effects.” Confining juvenile offenders in correctional institutions and other residential settings is far more expensive than standard probation or conventional community supervision and treatment programs.

According to the American Correctional Association, the average daily cost nationwide to lockup one juvenile offender in 2008 was \$241. The Broward Regional Juvenile Detention Center for a three-year period from July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2011 detained 6,792 Black male juveniles compared to 2,292 white male offenders.

Black females held in custody were 1,187 and 562 white females.

The Miami-Dade Regional Juvenile Detention Center confined 6,414 Black males and 3,304 white males.

There were 1,139 Black females detained and 610 white females.

The Westside Gazette asks its readers will African Americans continue to allow your tax dollars to be explicitly used to house Black male/female juveniles and just give their blessings to authorities, while white children only get a slap on the wrist.