

NEWS RELEASE

Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE) Idaho Legislature

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Confinement of Juvenile Offenders

Full report available on OPE website <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope/>

(BOISE) Today, the Legislature's independent, nonpartisan Office of Performance Evaluations released a report that analyzed confinement of offenders within Idaho's juvenile justice system. Two of the evaluators' primary findings are briefly outlined here:

- 1. Evaluators conclude that the average daily count of juvenile offenders committed to state custody has decreased from a high of 490 offenders in 2000 to 337 offenders in 2012.**

The impetus for this study came from a 2013 national report that erroneously concluded that Idaho's juvenile confinement rate had increased dramatically. Evaluators found that the report's data source (the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement) contained incomplete data for Idaho. Therefore, rather than increasing, evaluators instead found that the average daily count of juvenile offenders in confinement has been decreasing.

- 2. Evaluators identify that diversion programs designed to keep juveniles out of the formal juvenile justice system vary considerably across counties.**

A fundamental goal of the juvenile justice system is to meet the needs and address the risks of juvenile offenders in the least restrictive environment possible. Idaho counties have set up programs that divert juveniles out of the system in lieu of filing a formal petition with the court. Evaluators found that these programs vary in their design and eligibility, which calls into question whether enough of the appropriate diversions take place.

Recommendations and Policy Considerations

Given these two main findings and others outlined in the full report, evaluators offer a set of recommendations for the juvenile justice system and a set of considerations for policymakers. These recommendations and considerations highlight where efforts can be targeted to improve the juvenile

justice system. Notably, many committed juvenile offenders have also received child protection and mental health services or also have substance use issues. Therefore, one of the policy considerations focuses on the importance of prevention and early intervention programs and services.

The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee approved a study request in March 2013 for evaluators to determine how many juvenile offenders are confined in Idaho and to research programs that could be introduced or expanded to reduce the number of confined offenders.