



CDC Releases Report Finding that Laws Transferring Youth to Adult Justice System Increases Violence and Harms Public Safety

A study published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released November 30, 2007 finds that transferring youth to the adult criminal justice system significantly increases crime and rather than improve public safety, produces the opposite effect. Youth who have been previously tried as adults are, on average, 34% more likely to commit crimes than youth retained in the juvenile justice system.

In response to the public health concerns associated with violence committed by youth in the United States, the CDC Task Force on Community Preventive Services conducted a systematic review on the transfer of youth to the adult criminal justice system. Overall, the Task Force recommends against laws or policies facilitating the transfer of juveniles from the juvenile justice to the adult judicial system for the purpose of reducing violence.

Key Findings:

- **Transferring juveniles to the adult justice system is counterproductive as a strategy for deterring subsequent violence:** The Task Force found strong evidence that youth who have been previously tried as adults are more likely to commit additional crimes. Youth who are transferred from the juvenile court system to the adult criminal system are approximately 34% more likely than youth retained in the juvenile court system to be re-arrested for violent or other crime.
- **Insufficient evidence that transferring youth to the adult criminal system prevents youth crime:** The Task Force found insufficient evidence to justify assertions that trying youth as adults acts as a deterrent to prevent youth from committing crimes in the first place.
- **Strengthened transfer policies may be harmful for those juveniles who experience transfer:** The review notes that other violent outcomes may result from the transfer of youth to the adult system including victimization of juveniles in adult facilities, and elevated suicide rates for juveniles incarcerated in adult facilities. Specific estimates of suicide rates in the report are: 2041 per 100,000 for youth held in adult detention facilities; 57 per 100,000 for youth held in juvenile detention centers; and 12.4 per 100,000 for all those aged 12 to 24 in the U.S. population.
- **Costs/benefits unknown:** The review notes a rarity of studies that compare the costs of transferring youth to the adult system against the costs of retaining youth in the juvenile justice system. While the review questions the motive for evaluating harmful interventions (transfer laws and policies), it suggests that a cost-benefit comparison of the adult and juvenile justice systems may foster a constructive debate over the economic consequences of reform.

Task Force:

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services is a 15-member non-Federal task force supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC scientists review the effectiveness of health care interventions for the Task Force that then makes recommendations to the public health community and health care delivery organizations. The recommendations generated by the Task Force are combined to form the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*, which includes a section on violence.

For more information:

The Task Force Report is available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/>. For more information, contact Robert A. Hahn, Ph.D., M.P.H., Coordinating Scientist, Violence Prevention Review and Excess Alcohol Consumption Review at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at: Phone: 404-498-0958 or by email at: rah1@cdc.gov.