the times

Authorities seek ways to improve juvenile system

Justice summit aims to aid youth

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Black youths are arrested far more frequently than youngsters of other races and are less likely to be directed to alternative sentencing programs, the Indiana Bar Association reported Wednesday.

The association, along with the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services, is looking for a new approach to dealing with youth in the criminal justice system. Both agencies are looking at the best practices across the country and how to put those practices into place in Indiana, bar officials said.

Lake County Juvenile Court Judge Mary Beth Bonaventura said there is disparity in the delivery of services, so judges, law enforcement and others are looking at what they can do to reverse the number of all youth in the system.

"We're trying to think out of the box," she said. "How do we deliver our services to kids who come into contact with the justice system?"

The Indiana Bar Association is hosting a Presummit Law Enforcement Roundtable at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday in the fifth floor conference center at the Regions Bank Building in downtown Indianapolis. The event will include a dialogue with law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, probation officers and detention center directors.

It will be followed the next day by the Summit on Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System: A Statewide Dialogue at 8 a.m. Aug. 27 at the Indiana Government Center in Indianapolis.

Lake Circuit Court Judge Lorenzo Arredondo said there are many factors that contribute to the problem, including family situations and environment.

"Reducing racial and ethnic disparities is consistent with Indiana's commitment to a fair system of justice," he said. "The innovative practices showcased at this summit point to communities that are achieving better outcomes for youth of color, enhanced public safety and effective crime prevention as a result."

The summit's central focus is to create a dialogue among decision makers in the juvenile system and lay the groundwork for improving disparities as a state, Arredondo said.

Dan Lowery, vice president of academic affairs at Calumet College of St. Joseph in Hammond, said it's important to be sensitive about the issues and to explore children's needs.

"Judges will be a catalyst, but there may need to be some legislative changes as well," he said.

Disproportionate Minority Contact in Indiana: Lake County 2005-06

Arrested Count % of total

Native American 233 0.21%

Asian or Pacific Islander 972 0.90

Hispanic 19,354 17.82

Black, not of Hispanic origin 31,961 29.43

White, not of Hispanic origin 54,009 49.73

Other/Unknown 2,069 1.91

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Total	108,6	98 100)%									
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Transferred/Waived to Adult Court (3)

Native American 4 0.12%

Asian or Pacific Islander 10 0.29

Hispanic 510 14.80

Black, not of Hispanic origin 1,549 44.96

White, not of Hispanic origin 1,242 36.05

Other/Unknown 130 3.77

Total 3,445 100%

Source: Final report on "Disproportionate Minority Contact: Quantitative Analysis" submitted to the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute Title II Grant 2006-07 on June 30, 2007. The study was authored by Russell J. Skiba, Ph.D., Karega Rausch, Daniel Abbott and Ada Simmons, Ph.D.

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