



# Direct File of Youthful Offenders: A Case Study From Florida

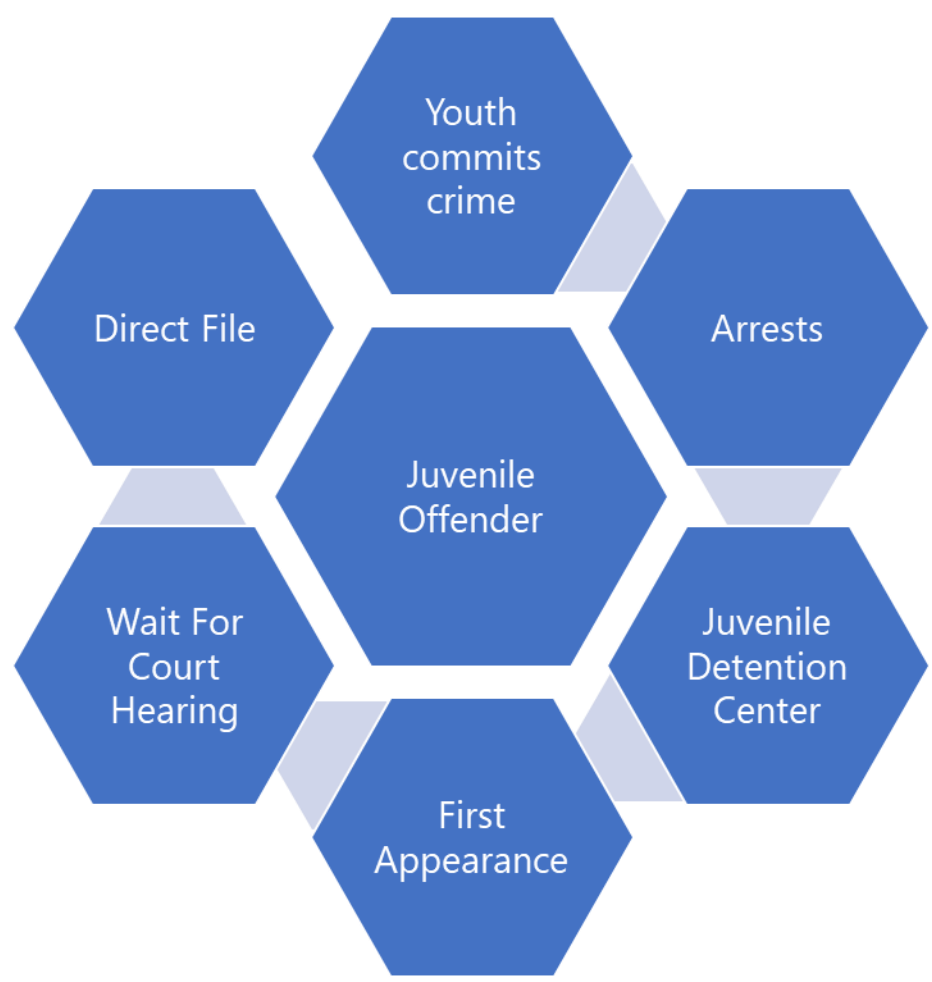
*Belgrave, Onetha , Mallett, Christopher ; Mentor*

Social Work, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Oh



**Abstract:** In the State of Florida, children are sent through the court system by the appointed state prosecutor to adult jails, “forced” to take plea bargains, and enter into a diversion program or prison. Upon exiting this system, they face barriers finding employment or housing. The label “convicted felon” follows them for the rest of their lives. The lack of resources and opportunities might be the reason behind the high recidivism rate. In this project, we explore the issues regarding youth offenders direct file, how it affects families especially those who are “at-risk”, why blacks are arrested and incarcerated more than any other race, and ways to reform the juvenile justice system. For this purpose, we interviewed community members with direct experience in how the criminal system in Florida interacts with the youth, the support aimed at youth prevention of offending, and the initiatives taken by non-government entities. These interviews illustrated how the State of Florida does not have effective strategies to support at-risk youth and prevent them from entering the criminal justice system. Private citizens and non-profit organizations are filling the void by creating prevention programs. Together, these findings suggest there is a need for juvenile justice reform and greater investment in prevention strategies.

## Methods



## Results

- Florida is the number one state to direct file youthful offenders.
- Allowing state prosecutors to unilaterally make the decision to transfer cases to the adult system.
- Florida has transferred over nine hundred youth offender cases to adult courts.
- The disproportionate impact on blacks and those in low-income areas affected and “branded” for life after their criminal charges.
- Increase in recidivism.
- Lack of resources once the convicted felon leaves prison
- Imprisonment causing mental health issues such as depression

## Conclusions

- Florida legislature reconstruction of the justice system.
- Decision on the juvenile’s case should include professionals such as judges, social workers, psychologists along with state prosecutors involved in the processing of youthful offenders.
- Funding for mental health creates new avenues to decrease stress.
- Reevaluate the school system in urban schools.
- Funding for work programs and invest in community outreach programs.

## Introduction::



Florida's School-to-Prison Pipeline Is Largest in the Nation It used to be that getting in a schoolyard fight meant a trip to the principal’s office—detention, maybe. But in Florida, more than any other state, that schoolyard fight can lead to the student’s arrest and even felony charges.

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank Dr. Christopher Mallett for his assistance with my research project. In addition, I would like to thank my interviewees Marquise McKenzie, CEO of the “Dirt Master, Natasha Cobb, an Orange County Public School Teacher, Monica James a social worker with the Orange County Public School System. Last, my references either by email, YouTube, and articles..

Funding: McNair Scholars Program