

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – April 26, 2016

Juvenile Justice

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The reforms of the Ohio Juvenile Justice system initiated a move from reliance on the correctional facilities, now with an average daily facility population of 470, to a system supporting nearly 600 community programs throughout the state serving 79,000 youth. This gradual plan of action ranges from prevention and diversion to residential and community treatment. Juvenile justice advocates have been encouraged by these changes and are currently focused on shackling, seclusion, school discipline, truancy and parole based on mitigating factors.

Shackling, the use of restraints, is an issue currently being discussed in the House. **HB 363** requires restraints be removed from adjudicated youth during court. The Ohio Supreme Court has also been advancing a positive rule on restraints.

Seclusion of youth in adult jails and prisons, state youth correctional facilities, local juvenile detention centers, and residential treatment facilities ranks as a serious detriment to the health of Ohio youth. Currently there is no law in Ohio which prohibits the placement of youth in solitary confinement in juvenile or adult facilities. LWVO signed onto a petition with the Children's Law Center to call for action to stop seclusion in juvenile facilities.

Decreased school attendance due to behavior or truancy is directly proportional with negative short- and long-term consequences. The House is currently looking at ways to keep more students in school. Ohio law currently states that each school district must have a zero tolerance school discipline policy for "violent, disruptive, or inappropriate behavior, including excessive truancy." **HB 410** would require schools to develop a model policy for such behaviors that stresses preventative strategies and alternatives to suspension or expulsion. Under HB 410 students who are truant could not be referred directly to juvenile court without the school attempting to intervene.

Life without parole served in an adult prison can be crippling to young offenders. **Senate Bill 272** addresses the parole for youth who committed their offense under the age of 18, were prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system, and are serving life in adult prison. SB 272 creates individual mitigating factors for the parole board to consider for this population. This bill builds upon recent Ohio and US Supreme Court rulings finding that youth are fundamentally different from adults.

According to the LWV of Ohio's positions the League supports the right of juveniles to unbiased treatment regardless of race or ethnicity. The juvenile detention system in Ohio disproportionately consists of black youth. This is a different issue and needs to be addressed.