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## U.S., like Ohio, locks up fewer youths

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By [Alan Johnson](#)

The Columbus Dispatch • Wednesday February 27, 2013 5:21 AM

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A report showing that the U.S. incarceration rate of juveniles has dropped dramatically is old news in Ohio, where the number of offenders in Department of Youth Services custody has dropped nearly 70 percent since 2004.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation report released today found that the U.S. rate of juvenile incarceration fell more than 40 percent over 15 years. The number of youths in lockups dropped to 70,792 in 2010 from 107,637 in 1995, based on data from the Census Bureau.

The downward trend aside, more juveniles are locked up in the U.S. than in any other industrialized country, the foundation said. Many of the youths are nonviolent offenders jailed for crimes such as truancy, minor property offenses and probation violations.

“Locking up young people has lifelong consequences, as incarcerated youth experience lower educational achievement, more unemployment, higher alcohol- and substance-abuse rates, and greater chances of run-ins with the law as adults,” Bart Lubow, head of the foundation’s Juvenile Justice Strategy Group, said in a statement.

The foundation, a nonprofit philanthropic organization, said that

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corrections facilities for youths are “enormously costly to operate, often put youth at risk for injury and abuse, and are largely ineffective in reducing recidivism.”

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The incarceration rate is down for all racial groups. Black youths are almost five times more likely to be incarcerated than whites are, and Latinos and Native Americans are two to three times more likely than whites to be in lockup.

Ohio had 534 youths in state facilities at the end of December, a nearly 70 percent drop from the 1,757 in January 2004.

Ohio Youth Services Director Harvey Reed said Ohio has been on “the cutting edge” of juvenile reforms since the RECLAIM program began in the mid-1990s. The program works with communities to provide juveniles with treatment at the local level when possible, rather than shipping offenders to more-costly state facilities.

The result, Reed said, is that DYS has ended up with about 500 youth offenders, many of whom are violent and suffer from severe mental-health issues. “I'm sure my staff would tell you that sometimes dealing with these 500 kids seems like a thousand.”

Reed said he's trying to provide more-intensive treatment for juveniles. “Our goal is to have a better product go out of the door than came in the door.”

The Casey report recommends ways to further reduce youth incarceration, including locking up only those juveniles who pose a safety risk, and investing in alternatives in homes and communities.

[ajohnson@dispatch.com](mailto:ajohnson@dispatch.com)

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