



*Spring 2019*

## **ALL-TIME LOW IN JUVENILE “DIRECT FILE” CASES FOR NON-VIOLENT OFFENDERS**

Striking a balance between punishment and rehabilitation to better protect public safety, our office direct filed fewer non-violent juveniles into adult court last year.

Statistics released by Florida’s Department of Juvenile Justice showed that our office filed adult charges against 72 juveniles in fiscal year 2017-18, compared to 89 juveniles direct filed in the prior fiscal year. This marks the lowest number of juveniles direct filed into adult court since these statistics have been tracked. The drop is especially pronounced compared to fiscal year 2008-09, when there were 406 juveniles direct filed into adult court.

Our number one goal is to protect public safety, and that means proper charging and proportionate punishment with reduced recidivism. Our general policy is to use juvenile court on non-violent offenders under 18, especially in drug cases, but to continue to direct file juveniles who commit violent crimes or who are habitual offenders. The DJJ numbers show that our office direct filed 3.68% of all juveniles arrested in fiscal year 2017-18. Within that group of direct filed offenders, 76.39% were for violent crimes. Notably, even when an offender is direct filed into adult court, the court has the discretion to issue juvenile, instead of adult, sanctions.

These figures do not include the 800+ youths who receive civil citations for minor offenses such as marijuana possession through the county’s Juvenile First Offender program (JFO). Juveniles who receive a civil citation through the JFO program are not arrested and not referred to our office for prosecution.

We need to be smart about fighting crime, which means we must be careful not to create an adult criminal out of a non-violent youthful offender who can be turned around by juvenile court. Direct file into adult court should be reserved for violent crimes and also repeat offenders who have not been rehabilitated by the juvenile justice system.

A major reason behind the reduced direct file rate is the diligence of our prosecutors, who closely scrutinize each juvenile arrest to make the appropriate charge. A decision to direct file a juvenile into adult court must be approved by at least two separate, experienced prosecutors. That’s because a prosecutor’s office has an immense power to forever alter someone’s life, and so we must get it right every time.