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## **Audit of 17-year-olds in Adult Criminal Court Moves Ahead**

**Madison** – The Joint Legislative Audit Committee today recommend unanimously an audit on the effects of criminal court jurisdiction on all Wisconsin 17-year-olds. Currently, all 17-year-olds are in the adult criminal justice system, no matter how minor the crime. The Committee directed the Legislative Audit Bureau to study the outcomes for 17-year-olds in the adult system, as compared with outcomes for youth still in the juvenile court. National research suggests that kids who are treated in the adult system have very poor outcomes.

“Most parents and their teenage children have no idea that common adolescent mistakes made by a 17-year-old in Wisconsin will result in adult booking, adult court and adult jail. Taking a look at the effects of the 1995 law change that sent all 17-year-old offenders to adult court is timely and valid given what we know about the adolescent brain,” said Charity Eleson, executive director of Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF).

WCCF has been working to change the automatic treatment of 17-year-olds as adults for a few years. Rather than treat all 17-year-olds as adults for any crime, WCCF advocates for a more common sense approach: treating the vast majority of 17-year-olds as juveniles, while allowing district attorneys and judges to decide when a waiver to adult court is appropriate, for serious violent crimes or repeat offenders.

“The vast majority of 17-year-olds who are arrested in Wisconsin are not arrested for the most serious, violent crimes. The three most common crimes 17-year-olds were prosecuted for in 2005 were disorderly conduct, possession of marijuana and theft. We need to examine the costs to society when we decide subject a minor to the adult system,” said Wendy Henderson, policy analyst for WCCF. “At least if a 17-year-old stays in the juvenile system, we can be assured they will receive a full day of education.”

All comments received by the committee supported the audit, also testifying before the Joint Legislative Audit Committee in favor were: Representative Tamara Grigsby, Department of Corrections, Governor’s Juvenile Justice Commission, and Wisconsin County Human Services Association.

For more information on developmentally appropriate treatment of Wisconsin youth visit:  
[www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org)

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