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FLORIDA THE STATE/ IN BRIEF

# Study faults juvenile courts

October 24, 2006

TALLAHASSEE -- Florida courts routinely let indigent juvenile defendants give up their right to legal representation and when children do get lawyers, they often are inexperienced and overworked, a study released Monday says.

The National Juvenile Defender Center's report also faults Florida for putting the least-experienced judges on the juvenile bench and prejudicing their cases by hauling them into court in shackles.

The study, conducted with support from the state Supreme Court, Florida Bar and Florida Public Defender Association, concluded that efforts to improve the juvenile defense system have been limited by money and "lack of political will."

The study's authors, center director Patricia Puritz and Cathryn Crawford of Northwestern University Law School's Children and Family Justice Center, make several recommendations. They include consultation with a lawyer before children can waive their right to counsel because they often fail to realize the consequences of a juvenile conviction.

*Compiled from wire reports*

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