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Montgomery County POLICE REPORTER

Montgomery County Attorney's Office Sends Record Number of Juvenile Offenders to Texas Juvenile Justice Department

Posted by [Scott Engle](#)

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J D Lambright, Montgomery County Attorney

Montgomery County Attorney J D Lambright has released information concerning a significant increase in the number of juveniles the county has incarcerated in the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). Lambright explained that, while my office typically handles over 1,200 juvenile (ages 10 – 16 under current Texas law) cases a year, “most cases are resolved without requiring that the youth be removed from their homes. In the event a child does need to be removed, there are numerous placement facilities available short of the state-administered Texas Juvenile Justice Department. Only the most dangerous offenders are sent to the Juvenile Justice Department’s secure facilities, and to do so requires a demanding burden of proof.” According to state records, from 2010 through 2014, Montgomery County had sent an average of 14 juveniles to TJJD each year. That number skyrocketed to 31 in 2015 alone.

To illustrate the significance of that increase, Lambright provided a quick summary of how the juvenile justice system functions. “The juvenile system tries to strike an appropriate balance between protection of the community, rehabilitation, and punishment. Under the leadership of Juvenile Division Chief Marc Brumberger, the prosecutors, in conjunction with the Juvenile Probation Department, spend a great deal of time looking into the life circumstances of every child referred to us. For many first-time offenders accused of committing a misdemeanor, we try to handle the case with a period of informal supervision by the Juvenile Probation Department without an adjudication. (Adjudication in the juvenile system is essentially analogous to a conviction in the adult system).

For juveniles with multiple referrals or who commit a more serious offense, we will seek an adjudication and either formal probation or placement outside of the home at a facility that provides appropriate rehabilitation.” The various placement options that exist for juveniles include drug treatment facilities, vocational schools, boot camps, and the secure state facilities administered by TJJD.

Lambright continued, “A commitment to TJJD is the highest level of incarceration within the juvenile system. Over the last several years, both the Legislature and TJJD have made a concerted effort to minimize the number of offenders in those state facilities. Due to that effort to reduce the TJJD population, our office has had to reserve such incarceration for violent offenders, habitual offenders, and sexual predators. Even then, due to the statutory standards we must satisfy, it can be an uphill battle convincing the courts that a particular offender is in need of the most secure form of placement.”

Along with his firm stance on punishment for serious offenders, Lambright said that there was also an increase in the number of violent felony offenses being committed by juveniles. “In particular, we’ve seen a disturbing increase in aggravated robberies and aggravated sexual assaults. It’s too soon to tell whether this is a temporary spike or a new, heightened level of juvenile crime in our

County.” A significant number of the most serious felony allegations his office prosecuted during 2015 involved juveniles coming from Harris County. “By seeking substantial sentences against these youths, we are making every effort to ensure that Montgomery County will not become a preferred target for Harris County’s juvenile delinquents. We are also making it clear to our own resident adolescents that we will not tolerate such conduct in our community. Protection of our citizens is of paramount importance.”