

# The Washington Post

## Holder supports prevention for youths over courts

By PETE YOST  
The Associated Press  
Monday, March 7, 2011; 6:21 PM

WASHINGTON -- Attorney General Eric Holder said Monday that some programs aimed at scaring troubled teens into better behavior are failing in their mission.

Speaking to a legislative conference of county officials, the attorney general said the nation's system of juvenile justice must move away from prosecution and punishment and more toward prevention and intervention.

Holder cited a scientific review that found that children ordered into nine so-called scared straight programs around the country are nearly 30 percent more likely to offend than youths who are not.

"Scared straight" initiatives involve visits by troubled teenagers to prisons where intimidating inmates deliver in-your-face lectures about the harshness of life behind bars.

The attorney general says many youths who are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses often emerge violent or at the very least, traumatized.

The evidence is "calling us to question whether the current system is improving lives - or devastating them," Holder told the

National Association of Counties.

Citing several studies, Holder said that:

- Twelve percent of youths in state-operated and large locally or privately operated juvenile facilities reported experiencing at least one incident of sexual victimization while incarcerated.

- Young victims of suicide had nearly a 7 in 10 chance of an association with the juvenile justice system.

- Within a year of re-entry to the community, only 30 percent of previously incarcerated youths are involved in either school or work, with many ending up back in jail.

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