

# Court panel asks tougher juvenile laws

A state task force of children's experts is calling for an overhaul of the juvenile justice system that would include the creation of a separate department to handle issues involving children and their families.

The group also recommends that the Michigan Legislature deal more strictly with juvenile offenders who commit certain violent crimes and that juvenile court proceedings be public.

The 18-member Task Force, chaired by Probate Judge Raymond

L. King of Ogemaw County, was commissioned by the Michigan Supreme Court a year ago and presented its final report to the Michigan Supreme Court last week.

Chief Justice Dorothy Comstock Riley, who supervised the work of the Task Force, said "the group's assignment was made considerably easier because of the efforts of past committees which have studied children's issues."

ONE TASK Force proposal would

affect 15- and 16-year-olds who commit certain violent crimes.

When the prosecutor requests that such a juvenile be tried in adult court, the Task Force proposes that the juvenile be required to show why the Probate Court should deny the request.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that the Probate Court be permitted to retain jurisdiction over certain other juveniles until age 23.

It asks that the Legislature establish a Youthful Offender Division

within the proposed Department of Children and Family Services to accommodate such juveniles. Presently, juveniles not waived over for trial in adult court must be released from custody by age 19.

THE PROPOSED separate state department for children and families is one of the Task Force's primary recommendations.

"Creation of a department would demonstrate that issues affecting children and families are a priority

and that government is committed to addressing these concerns," the panel said.

The Task Force recommends that county or regional departments be set up to provide a minimum level of services to all children, regardless of where they live.

The report contains a "blueprint" for local and state service delivery, including a financing proposal aimed at encouraging local governments to provide more than minimum services. There also are suggestions for

helping counties during money short-

ages. Several Probate Court judges and members of state departments such as Mental Health and Social Services served on the Task Force. Other Task Force members included representatives of law enforcement and private agencies.

In addition, a legislative liaison and a staff person from the governor's office and the Department of Management and Budget regularly attended Task Force meetings.



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