

# WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

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November 2005

## Site of the Month

The night prior to writing this newsletter, one of the top stories on the news was the murder by an 18-year-old male of his 14-year-old girlfriend's parents. Detectives may be investigating whether the girl had prior knowledge of the murder. If she were involved the criminal justice system would determine her sentence. An organization named Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (HRWAI) would be opposed to a life-without-parole (LWOP) sentence.

HRWAI released a report last month which presents the results of their research on the number of young offenders sentenced to LWOP in the United States. The report reveals that at least 2,225 youth/children are in state and federal prisons serving LWOP sentences, about 185 times greater than the number of youth/children serving a similar sentence in all the other countries combined. HRWAI calls the U.S. an international anomaly.

Their data describe the young offenders as:

- ◆ primarily male (97.4 percent)
- ◆ primarily African American (60.0 percent)
- ◆ first-time offenders (59.0 percent)

Nevada has 16 youth offenders serving LWOP sentences. Nevada's LWOP rate is 1.5 per 10,000 14- to 17-year-olds (based on the U.S. Census population). Nevada ranks 16 among 40 states for which data were collected. The black LWOP rate is 4.6., white is 1.1, and Hispanic is 0.8. The minimum age for adult prosecution and for LWOP sentencing in Nevada is eight.

HRWAI recommends that lawmakers abolish LWOP sentences for any offense committed by a child. It is their belief that youth "do not have adults' developed abilities to think, to weight consequences, to make sound decisions, to control their impulses, and to resist group pressures; their brains are automatically different, still evolving into the brains of adults."

LWOP for persons under age 18 is a debatable topic; as such, neither Nevada KIDS COUNT nor I are taking a position on the issue. I do, however, want to bring the report to your attention. *The Rest of Their Lives: Life without Parole for Child Offenders in the United States* is available online at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/us1005/TheRestofTheirLives.pdf>.

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