

KIDS BEHIND BARS

These are the 54 inmates age 16 or younger serving time in Michigan prisons as of late 1999, in alphabetical order. Each is listed with his or her age at that time, the county in which each was sentenced and the offense.



Bruce W. Adams, 16, Wayne County, assault less than murder.



Christopher Avery, 16, Jackson County, larceny.



Robert L. Babb Jr., 15, Van Buren County, home invasion.



William E. Beller, 16, St. Joseph County, home invasion.



Deandre Blakely, 16, Berrien County, first-degree rape.



Fredrick Brown III, 15, Genesee County, armed robbery.



Larry Brown, 16, Wayne County, armed robbery.



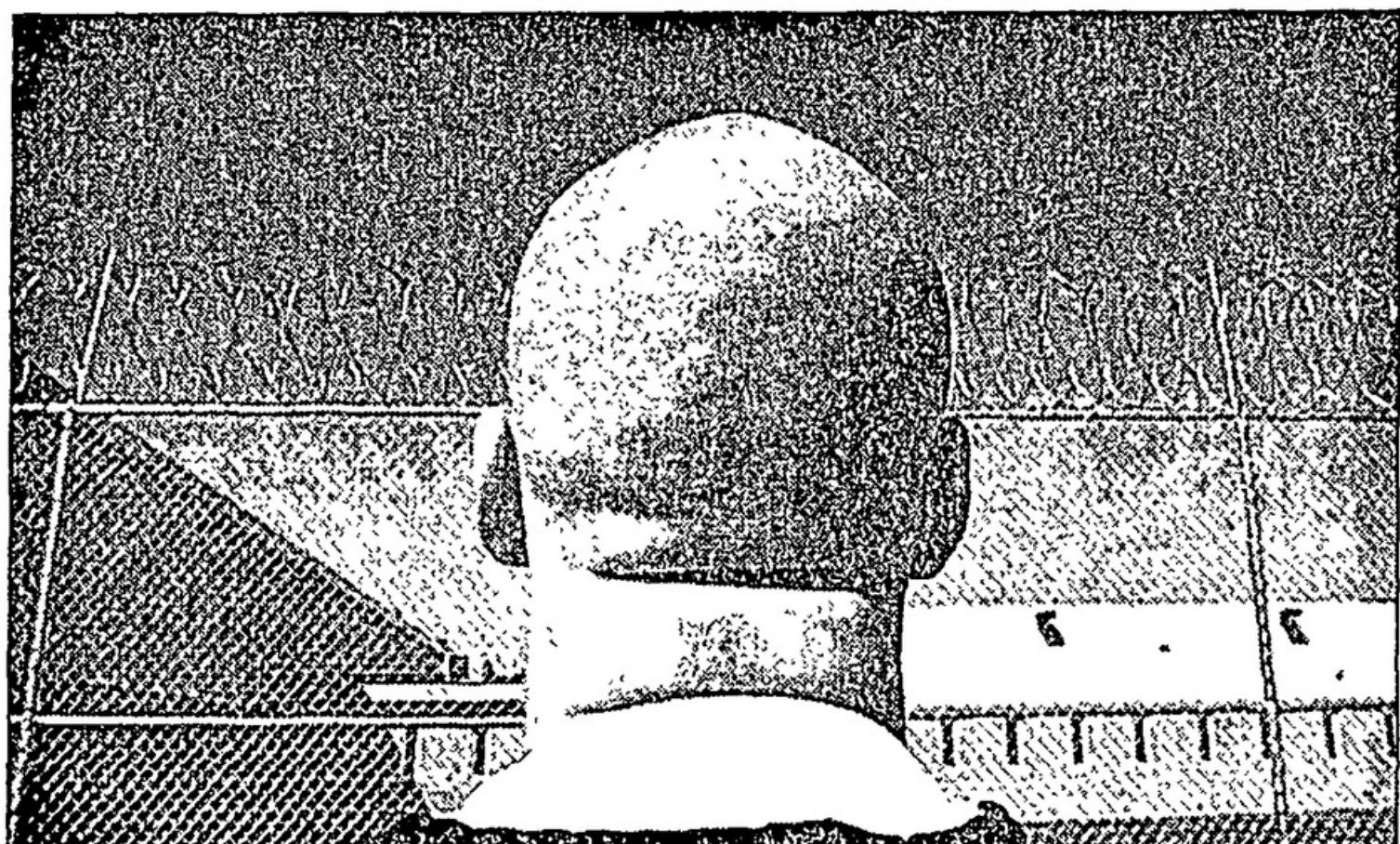
Lynard Brown, 16, Wayne County, armed robbery.



Lucas D. Burnett, 16, Genesee County, escape.



Adam A. Caldwell, 15, Hillsdale County, assault less than murder.



Forty-five minutes a day in the prison yard is as close as an inmate gets to freedom.

PRISON Youths are getting little help

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repeatedly in an Ionia prison by a 20-year-old cellmate who was in for a violent robbery and attempted murder.

While prison officials say attacks against kids are rare, the rapes of the teen raise questions about the prison system's ability to protect juveniles from violent adults, critics say.

■ The state has even more trouble separating girls from older women in prison. Last year, guards caught a 16-year-old girl in a sexual act with her 27-year-old cellmate at Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth. She was one of three girls in the adult prison system, including a Saginaw girl who started her armed robbery sentence at age 14.

■ Nearly three-quarters of the juveniles locked up in state prisons at the end of last year were

minorities, mostly black males. That's higher than the prison system's general population, which is 58 percent minority. In fact, all six of the Kent County juveniles in state prisons late last year were minorities — four blacks and two Hispanics.

■ State prisons, including the youth prison, offer little counseling for even the most troubled kids.

Jason Wallager was 14 when he stabbed his father 19 times and killed him in their home near Ludington. He said he sees a prison psychologist once every two months, for 10 minutes at a time, at the Michigan Reformatory in Ionia.

His eyes still light up and a smile takes over his face when he talks about the killing. "I did it," he said in a prison interview. "I did it, and it was fun, too. He got what he deserved."

Wallager is 17 now and could be out of prison by the time he's 31.

'Throwing the kids away'

In 1996, the state Legislature passed a law allowing judges to send kids of any

age to prison for serious crimes, including murder, rape and armed robbery. Before that, nobody under age 15 could go to prison.

The most controversial part of the law allows prosecutors to send a child as young as 14 straight to adult court, without a judge's approval.

Kent County prosecutors used this automatic waiver in February to charge 14-year-old Howard Welch Jr. with murdering his 2-year-old cousin in Grand Rapids while baby-sitting the toddler. Welch, a special education student with a "borderline deficient" IQ of 74, is the youngest murder suspect ever charged as an adult in Kent County.

Some police, prosecutors, lawmakers and victims argue these kids belong in prison.

They point to kids like 14-year-old Martez Stewart, the state's youngest

prisoner and youngest-ever lifer. He stabbed a neighbor girl 33 times at her home in Jackson and is serving life in prison for second-degree murder.

But not all kids in prison are violent or have long criminal records. Like the 15-year-old boy raped in prison, one in five is in for a property crime, such as burglary, larceny and auto theft.

Advocates for these kids are likely to leave prison bitter and more dangerous.

"You're not only throwing the kids away, but you're ultimately throwing away the protection of the public," said Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Moore, who received national attention in January when he sentenced Nathaniel Abraham to a juvenile program for killing a man when he was 11.

The public might think it's being protected, but it's wrong. These kids will get out."

State Department of Corrections Director Bill Martin defended the prison system's handling of what he calls "youthful offenders," though he acknowledged they cause more trouble than older prisoners.

"We can handle whoever it is the



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BILL MARTIN
director, state
Department of
Corrections



PRESS PHOTOS/CHRIS CLARK

Youth prison Warden Dave Trippett attributes many prison problems to "growing pains" and says improvements are being made.

courts send us," Martin said. "Here's the choices: You either leave this vicious, senseless person on the street or you can send them to prison. Given those two choices, send them to me."

Mop handles and broomsticks

With the new law targeting violent teens, the state needed a place to put them.

Gov. John Engler proposed a prison for youths in a 1994 campaign promise to get tough on the worst juvenile offenders.

The state opened bids to private companies and chose Wackenhut Corrections Corp. of Florida, which built the prison at Baldwin for \$39 million and rents it to the state for \$5.6 million a year. The state also pays \$67.50 a day per inmate.

The rate is cheaper than the state's other maximum-security prisons, which cost \$95.50 a day for each inmate. It's also far less than the \$247.74 a day for boys sent to the Maxey Training School in Whitmore Lake, a high-security rehabilitation center for juvenile delinquents.

The prison system expected 200 new juveniles a year after the law targeting teens was passed, but the numbers have

been less than half that.

At the end of last year, the state held 54 juveniles under age 17 in its prisons. Two-thirds were at the prison in Baldwin, while the rest were scattered in prisons across the state, including the Michigan Reformatory and the Riverside Correctional Facility, both in Ionia.

The rest of the 330 inmates at the "Punk Prison" are young adults who got into trouble as kids. Under state law, they must be moved out before they turn 20.

In late July, the first inmates entered the Baldwin prison in shackles and handcuffs.

It quickly became a dangerous place.

Inmates attacked guards 17 times in the five months the youth prison was open last year, prison records show.

At least five of the 20 guards attacked in those assaults suffered "serious physical injuries," including two struck by a mop handle and broomstick, according to the reports.

The prison also reported 27 assaults and fights between inmates, including three sexual assaults. Most of the victims were treated in the prison's medical unit for minor injuries.

The prison's rate of critical incidents — from assaults to fights to attempted suicides — was nearly triple that of the other maximum-security prisons, according to a Press analysis of state reports.

Guard Kenneth Varney said he's been attacked three times by inmates since the prison opened. He had worked for a year in an adult prison in Georgia, where the inmates never attacked him, he said.

"Kids are more spontaneous," Varney said. "They're a lot quicker to act on emotions. ... You try to talk 'em down, calm 'em. It's almost like a parent, sometimes like a baby-sitting job."

An 18-year-old from Kent County tried to head-butt Varney after wiggling out of his restraints, including the chain around his waist, in the visiting room.

Varney's also been punched in the face twice — by Robert Wilson, a 19-year-old serving mandatory life for first-degree murder in Muskegon County, and by 18-year-old Brian Weathers, who is in prison for stealing a firearm in Oakland County.

Weathers, who became angry when guards told him to hand over photographs torn from a pornographic magazine, pleaded guilty in late March to as-

saulting a prison employee, which could add four years to his sentence.

He is one of two inmates who have pleaded guilty to assaulting guards.

Anthony Howell, 19, a robber from Kent County, was sentenced in March to up to four years in prison for clubbing guard James L. King with a mop handle in August 1999.

King was treated at Reed City Hospital for abrasions.

"Well, I was working, and he (King) said something that I didn't like," Howell said at his guilty plea. "I hit him with the mop stick."

A third inmate, Jose A. Faustino, 17, serving an attempted armed robbery sentence from Kent County, is awaiting trial on a charge of attacking prison Lt. Donald J. Rector with a padlock in September.

Rector and other guards were trying to calm inmates who had refused to go into their cells in a housing area known as E-Pod.

"They were kicking and banging on

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WHY THEY'RE LOCKED UP

More than 80 percent of the 54 juveniles locked up in state prisons late last year were in for violent crimes. The rest were in for property crimes, including burglary, car theft, and larceny.

Violent crimes: 44

Murder: 5

Manslaughter: 1

Armed robbery: 14

Assault: 8

Attempt robbery: 6

Carjacking: 3

Sexual assault: 3

Weapons: 2

Other: 2

Property crimes: 10

Home invasion/burglary: 5

Auto Theft: 2

Arsenal: 1

Escape: 1

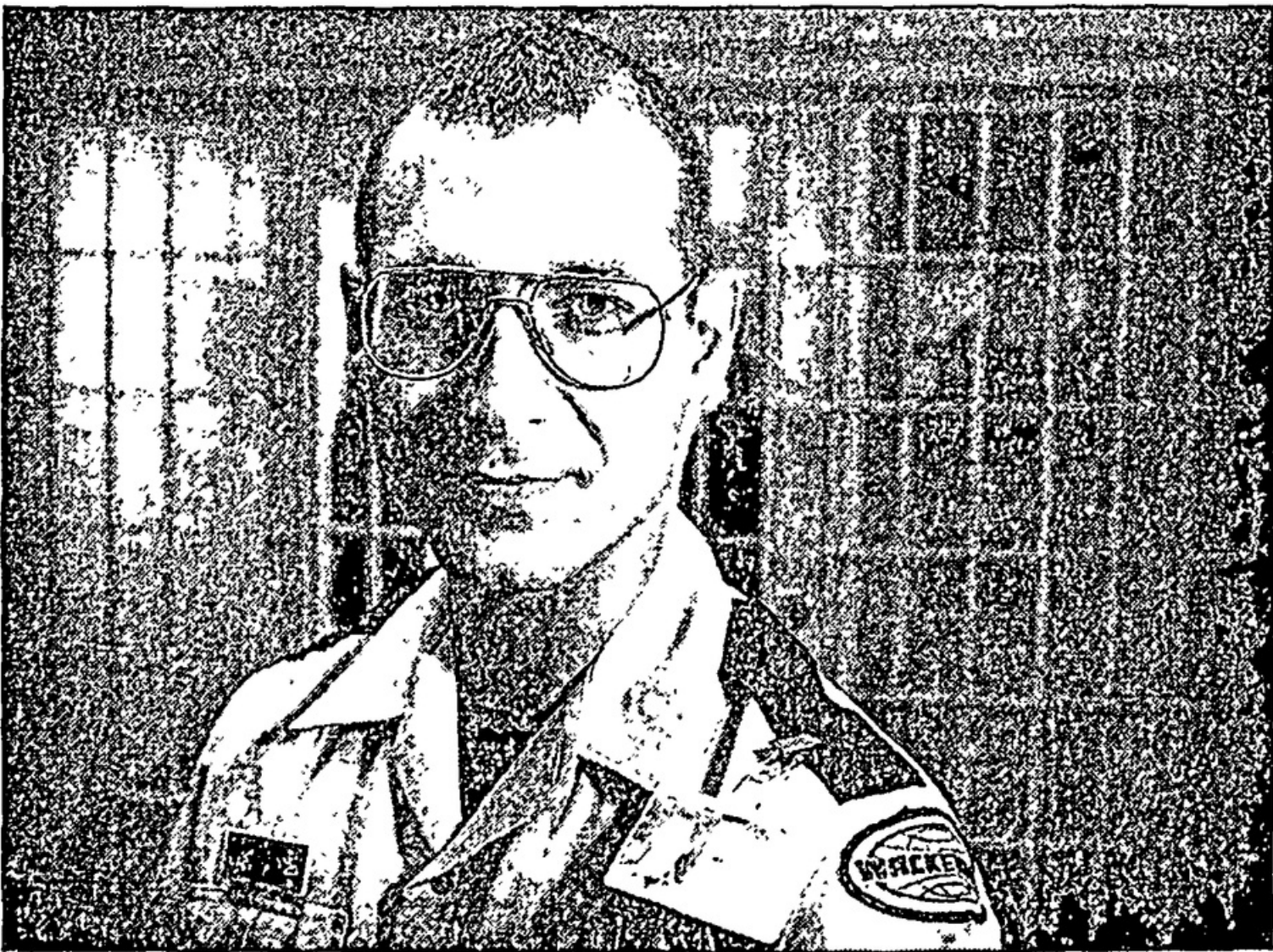
Larceny: 1

Source: Press analysis of state Department of Corrections reports

PRESS GRAPHIC/CHRIS CLARK

Kids are more spontaneous. They're a lot quicker to act on emotions. ... You try to talk 'em down, calm 'em. It's almost like a parent, sometimes like a baby-sitting job.

KENNETH VARNEY
guard



Marlon J. Clarke, 16, Berrien County, assault with intent to rob.



Roshon Cobb, 15, Oakland County, home invasion.



Mark A. Colbert, 16, Kent County, armed robbery.



Rodney W. Connolly, 16, Alpena County, felonious assault.



Deandre W. Cunningham, 16, Genesee County, third-degree rape.



Randall Dodson, 16, Kent County, armed robbery.



Brian Faltrier, 16, Wayne County, armed robbery.



Bianca Foster, 14, Saginaw County, armed robbery.



Wilson Gaines II, 15, Saginaw County, armed robbery.



Brian Gascoyne, 16, Saginaw County, first-degree rape.



Lamerrius Glass, 15, Berrien County, assault less than murder.