

in the state I guess, that we have set up, a number of years ago we set up a separate juvenile court system in the state or the provisions for separate juvenile court systems within counties that seek to have them. It has been my perception since I have been down here that there have been those that have been chipping away at the juvenile justice system. A few years ago, for instance, we passed a bill that locked in the three counties that currently have separate juvenile courts. It's basically the only counties that can have one. Is that correct, Senator Hoagland, a few years ago, a couple of years ago we did pass a bill that raised the population limit of counties that can have separate juvenile systems to basically the three that now have them, where it used to be 30,000, now it is up to something like 80,000, is that correct?

SENATOR HOAGLAND: That is right, yes, and county judges act as juvenile judges everywhere else in the state.

SENATOR WITHEM: Okay, what my concern is, I guess, Senator Hoagland, as I understand the intent of this amendment is to allow county judges to be assigned to juvenile cases when the court caseload warrants that in Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster County?

SENATOR HOAGLAND: That is correct.

SENATOR WITHEM: Okay, now is there anything you can tell me that will assure me that this is not a further erosion of the concept of juvenile justice where specific judges are trained in dealing with young people and deal with young people in a manner separate from what a traditional judge deals with a traditional adult offender?

SENATOR HOAGLAND: Yes, my response is that, Senator Withem, is that far too much is made of that. In Senator Smith's district, in Senator Morehead's district, everywhere else in the state, county judges are also juvenile judges. It is only in Omaha, in Lincoln, in Sarpy County, we have the so-called separate court and the county judges everywhere else in the state, in Senator Lamb's area, they are doing a perfectly fine job.

SENATOR WITHEM: Then are you saying there is no particular reason then for having separate juvenile courts? Are you saying we don't need to protect that concept because it