

INMATE

FROM B1

Inmate changes legal system

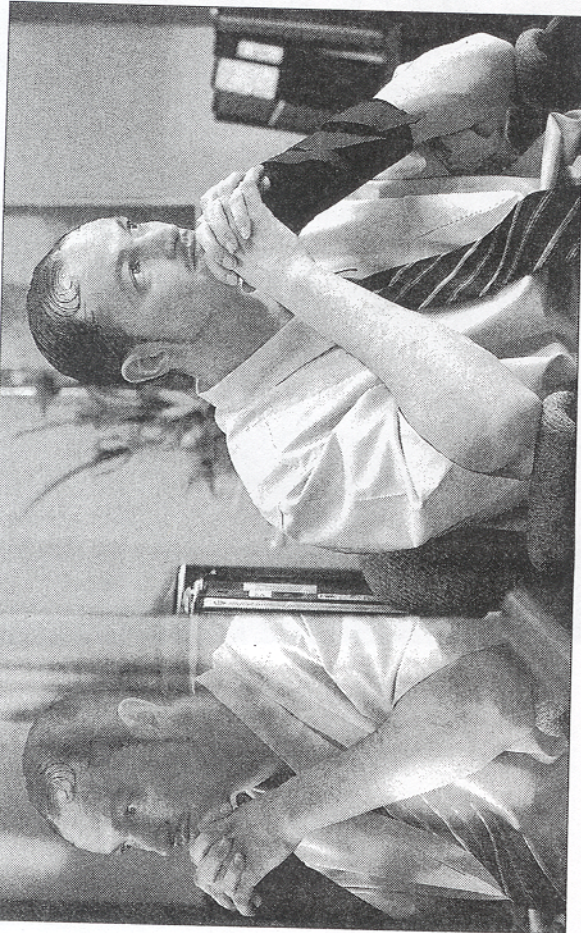
Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court judges are just now changing their procedures and forms to comply with the appellate court's ruling in December, Mark Majer, their staff attorney, said.

And they have to correct another problem that went unnoticed for the last three years.

Juvenile Court has been threatening teenagers with and sometimes imposing indefinite license suspensions that were outlawed in 2002, when legislators changed state law to explicitly limit juvenile court judges to imposing maximum suspensions of two years.

Court officials have also been telling 16- to 18-year olds that their licenses could be suspended through age 21, which also violates the 2002 law.

"We hadn't kept up with the



Rodney Keffer, at his attorney's office, talked about his five-year struggle to get out from under an indefinite driver's license suspension imposed.

DAVID I.
ANDERSEN
THE PLAIN
DEALER

unable to obtain a valid driver license is well-documented, Judge Sean Gallagher wrote in the decision.

"The Juvenile Court lacked the authority to revoke a driver's license for life under any section of Ohio law.

That's what Keffer understood when he began studying the law at a prison library in 1999. He was serving time for robbery.

Keffer, who also learned welding in prison, filed motions with the Juvenile Court requesting that the suspension and fines be lifted since he was 25 years old, incarcerated and indigent.

When he was ignored and then denied, he hooked up with the local Legal Aid Society and sued.

Reflecting on his victory, Keffer said, "I'm turning my life around. It feels good to right a wrong for lots of other people struggling like me."

He plans to attend Cuyahoga Community College to become a paralegal.

sions were or are poor and unable to pay the fines. And without a driver's license, it is much more difficult to get a job.

"In this poorest city in the country, people don't need more impediments," Icove said.

The appellate court judges agreed.

"The damage to young adults

are under a juvenile court suspension by calling 614-752-7500. General information is available at www.bmv.ohio.gov.

"This will help thousands of Ohioans, many of them impoverished, to get their licenses," Dawson said.

Most of the people affected by indefinite juvenile court suspen-

law," Majer said last week. Meanwhile, the horde of adults with lingering juvenile suspensions will not have to visit the court to clear their records. It will be done automatically by the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

Bureau attorney John Guldin said Ohioans can find out if they

indefinite juvenile court suspen-

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:
diacoboni@plained.com, 216-999-4852