



# **Bipartisan Working Group On Youth Violence**



**Final Report  
106th Congress**

# **BIPARTISAN WORKING GROUP ON YOUTH VIOLENCE**

## **FINAL REPORT**

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**November 17, 1999**

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H232 Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Gephardt  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H204 Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Minority Leader Gephardt:

We are writing to inform you that the Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence has completed its work on a report regarding the prevalence of youth violence in America, the factors that contribute to this problem, and possible solutions that members of both parties can embrace. Attached is a copy for your review.

During the fall, the 24 members of the Working Group have reviewed studies on the problem of youth violence and heard testimony from expert witnesses from academia, law enforcement, the judicial system, and advocacy groups. Although the work was time-consuming, most of us believe it was an effort that was both personally and professionally rewarding.

The issue of youth violence presents numerous complex social and economic problems. Although statistics reveal that the prevalence of youth violence has been declining in recent years, it remains a critically important issue that must be addressed. Fortunately, there are common themes that run through the most successful programs to reduce youth violence. The experts who met with the Working Group agreed that early intervention and prevention efforts that require the close participation of parents and communities are essential to reducing youth violence. As the attached report reveals, encouraging more of these programs will be an effective and efficient use of resources.

There are many issues, such as gangs, family violence, and the impact of sports figures and other cultural influences, that deserve to be explored in greater detail. Given the timeline under which we had to operate, however, we believe our findings present a solid overview of the causes of youth violence and how Congress may work with state and local governments, educators, community leaders, and families to improve the lives of our youth. That said, there are many members of the Working Group who would like to extend its mission into the second session of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
The Honorable Richard Gephardt  
November 17, 1999  
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Thank you for your leadership in establishing this important effort. We both believe it was a worthwhile and rewarding endeavor, and we look forward to your comments on our report.

Best regards,

Martin Frost  
Member of Congress

Jennifer Dunn  
Member of Congress

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## **BI-PARTISAN WORKING GROUP ON YOUTH VIOLENCE**

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### **PURPOSE**

The working group is established to identify causes and to advance through consensus (a majority of Republicans and a majority of Democrats) solutions to fight the rise of youth violence in our nation today.

### **RESEARCH**

Each of six teams, with two Republicans and two Democrats per team, will prepare a one-hour presentation to the entire group during the first six weekly meetings. In preparation, Members will work at an individual and group level to conduct in-depth research. During August, Members are encouraged to hold at least one roundtable, townhall, or meeting in their districts to gather ideas.

### **MEETINGS**

Members will meet once a week, from 8am-9am Wednesdays in H-137. Any Member proposal or idea will be submitted to Reps. Dunn and Frost by the day before the meeting.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Presentations by all teams will be completed by October 20, 1999, so that the full working group can discuss and vote on ideas by October 27. Approved ideas requiring legislation or other action by Congress will be sent to the Speaker and the Minority Leader.

The working group will complete its work by submitting a final document highlighting proposals that have been completed and items requiring further action to the Speaker and the Minority Leader at the adjournment of the Congressional Session.

### **PRESS**

No statement or press conference will be released or held on behalf of the Working Group without the participation and input of the Co-Chairs.

### **TEAMS**

- 1. Parents and Families** (Kelly, Etheridge, McKeon, Stupak) *September 15*
  - *Strong family relationships*
  - *Single parent families*
  - *Welfare dependency*
  - *Parental responsibility*
  - *Peer Influences*
  - *Mentoring Programs*
  - *Child Care*
  - *Role Models: Parents, family friends*
  
- 2. Law enforcement systems (cops, judges, parole and probation officers – from police to penalties)** (Barr, Delahunt, Dunn, Scott) *September 22*
  - *Teaching youths responsibility and consequences*
  - *Evaluating the justice system*
  - *School security*
  
- 3. Schools** (Mink, Wilson, Roemer, Biggert) *September 29*

- *One-on-one teaching*
  - *Stronger bonds within the school*
  - *1-800 hotline numbers*
  - *Smaller schools*
  - *Counseling*
  - *Reduced class size*
  - *Safe and Drug Free Schools reauthorization*
  - *Expanded before and after school programs to avoid “latchkey” kids*
  - *Teacher training*
  - *Crisis response plan involving entire community*
  - *Quality of education in Rural vs. Urban areas*
  - *Role models: teachers, advisors*
- 4. Community** (Souder, Cramer, Tancredo, Menendez) *October 6*
- *what programs currently exist focusing effectively on youth*
  - *faith-based organizations, non-profits, think tanks, etc.*
- 5. Popular culture, media influences** (Frost, Greenwood, Hinojosa, Wamp) *October 13*
- *Teaching youths the difference between life and the movies*
  - *The Internet*
  - *Ratings*
  - *Character education*
  - *Sports figures*
- 6. Health (treatment issues, mental health, substance abuse)** (Jackson-Lee, Portman, Roukema, Levin) *October 20*
- *the role of good physical health and education*
  - *Low self-esteem*
  - *Access to mental health services, including the involvement of parents and guardians*
  - *Helping students fight depression*
  - *Suicide*
  - *Drugs*

August 6, 1999

## Members of the Bi-Partisan Working Group on Youth Violence

### *Republicans:*

Jennifer Dunn, Chair  
Zach Wamp, Vice-Chair  
Heather Wilson  
Jim Greenwood  
Mark Souder  
Sue Kelly  
Marge Roukema  
Judy Biggert  
Buck McKeon  
Bob Barr  
Tom Tancredo  
Rob Portman

### *Democrats:*

Martin Frost, Co-Chair  
Robert Menendez, Vice-Chair  
Bud Cramer  
William Delahunt  
Sander Levin  
Bobby Scott  
Bart Stupak  
Bob Etheridge  
Rubén Hinojosa  
Patsy Mink  
Tim Roemer  
Sheila Jackson-Lee

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

The Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence was formed on June 25, 1999, by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Rep. J. Dennis Hastert, and the House Minority Leader, Rep. Richard Gephardt. It was tasked with identifying causes and advancing consensus solutions to fight the rise of youth violence in our nation today. The original mandate by the Speaker of the House and the Minority Leader gave the Working Group until the end of the first session of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress to complete this work. The Working Group held its organizational meeting on August 4<sup>th</sup> and has met every Wednesday morning since September 15th.

Understanding that time was short, the Working Group split into six subgroups of four members each, two Republicans and two Democrats, to thoroughly explore specific issues thought to affect youth violence. The six subgroups are parents and families, law enforcement, school safety, community programs, popular culture and the media, and health. Each subgroup was to study its area in depth and report findings back to the full group through a one-hour presentation.

The goal of each subgroup was to work in a bipartisan manner to find problems and solutions to youth violence in each of the issues in their area of responsibility. Subgroups were encouraged to meet on their own time to hear testimony from witnesses who are experts in the field that the subgroup was charged with studying. These witnesses, and the information they provided, often were called upon to provide the foundation for the presentation to the full Working Group.

By providing a forum for members to meet on a bipartisan and informal basis, we believe the Working Group has been able to identify many consensus areas for action on youth violence. This project is a labor of love for both the Members and the experts who provided information and analysis, often traveling many miles at their own expense.

Because the time was compressed, the Working Group believes that the House Leadership should consider extending the deadline to complete a final report and allow Members to probe in greater depth the broad area of youth violence in our nation. The shortness of time did not allow for complete consideration of the full range of information and resources available. The Working Group has provided recommendations that will begin to ameliorate the problem of youth violence. Nevertheless, there is much more work to be done. We believe this was a positive work experience and the right way to approach this serious issue. Functioning as a team, we have learned and researched together, discovering common themes and areas where Congress can provide leadership.

### DEBUNKING MYTHS

One of the most important tasks of the Working Group has been to review issues surrounding youth violence in a bipartisan and dispassionate manner. There are many misconceptions about the prevalence of youth violence in our society and it is important to peel back the veneer of hot-tempered discourse that often surrounds the issue. One of the most common myths that must be debunked immediately is that youth violence is *increasing* across the nation. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that the juvenile homicide arrest rate has dropped steadily and dramatically since 1993. This, of course, mirrors the reduction in violent crime seen in all age groups and indicates that trends in *youth* violence, while unique in certain respects, are not always distinguishable from society at large. In fact, according to one expert that appeared before the Working Group, Dr. Laurence Steinberg, violent crimes attributable to youth are lower today than they were 25 years ago.

Another common misconception is that schools are becoming an increasingly violent place and do not provide a sanctuary for learning. This misconception is largely driven by the attention that the mass media rightly gave a recent spate of school tragedies in Colorado, Arkansas, Oregon, and Kentucky. While it is important to carefully review the circumstances surrounding these horrifying incidents so that we may learn from them, we must also be cautious about inappropriately creating a cloud of fear over every student in every classroom across the country. In the case of youth violence, it is important to note that, statistically speaking, schools are among the safest places for children to be.

#### CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

So if the problem does not seem to be as big as we perceive it to be, why is it important to continue to tirelessly search for solutions to youth violence? There are two reasons. First, there is almost always a pattern to youth violence that involves a child graduating to more serious offenses. Every expert who came before us to testify on the complex issues surrounding youth violence pointed out that, if caught early enough, young people can be spared a life of crime and innocent people will never become victims. Second, simply because a serious problem is on the decline, it is not reason to abandon efforts to further reduce it. The salvation of one child and the sparing of one innocent victim is enough to validate a sustained and serious effort to combat youth violence.

Recognizing that there is a problem, reviewing objective analysis to determine the extent of the problem, and resolving to do something about it is only the first phase. The second, and much more complex, phase is deciding *what* are the most probable causes of youth violence. Thirdly, we must determine what, within its scope of responsibility for state and local affairs, Congress can do to ameliorate the problem. Listening to what various experts believe the causes of youth violence are, and discussing what the congressional role is in combating them, has been the focus of the Working Group's efforts.

#### CONCLUSION

The Working Group met on six different occasions to hear testimony from experts on a wide variety of issues thought to contribute to or reduce youth violence. Despite the range of issues, there were several recurring themes that spanned the breadth of the discussion and connected many of the issues together.

- **Prevention and early intervention programs are essential to reducing youth violence.**

Overall, the need for prevention and early intervention programs at every step is paramount. Since the most important contributing factor to youth violence is the absence of a nurturing and supportive home environment, we know that youth can be steered away from crime. Exposure to violence in the home and the lack of a strong role model, however, will deny youth access to a moral education. Without a strong moral foundation, the lessons of hostility as a means of problem solving and an inability to equate actions with consequences will foster criminal behavior. Building strong relationships between children and their parents and communities is the best way to ensure their health and well-being.

- **Parents and communities must take an active and positive role in the lives of children.**

Parents are the best teachers a child can have. There is no true substitute for the active involvement of the parent since nobody can be as personally invested in a child. But, additional support can be found through the efforts of community- or faith-based organizations, educators, and law enforcement officials. These efforts are essential to identifying, educating, and mentoring at-risk youth who may lack an ideal support structure at home. To be truly successful, however, these efforts must be coordinated so that each aspect of the community is working to respond to each youth's unique needs.

- **At-risk youth need access to childhood health programs and mental health services.**

Ensuring the physical and psychological health of all children has proven to be an effective way to increase educational aptitude and increase social skills. Early childhood programs have provided many children with the care and education they need to enter school ready to learn. In addition, mental health services should be provided to help youth work through problems such as depression and aggression.

- **The juvenile justice system should treat children individually and with the objective of rehabilitation.**

Despite the best efforts of families, concerned citizens, educators, and government agencies, we cannot fully prevent youth violence. Instead, our goal should be ensuring that we work collaboratively to address the needs of at-risk children before they commit crimes, while striking an appropriate balance between individualized sanctions and treatment once they enter the juvenile justice system. This means that once a youth enters the juvenile justice system, the judges must have access to the social, educational, and criminal history of the youth so that appropriate sanctions and/or treatment may be implemented. In addition, there should be mental health screenings and counseling available in the event that it is a necessary component of rehabilitation.

- **Information sharing between educators, law enforcement, social services agencies, and judges is essential to addressing the unique needs of a particular youth.**

There is a lack of collaboration between many different agencies and individuals with responsibility for monitoring at-risk youth. This is not necessarily due to an unwillingness to cooperate, but rather technological and legal barriers that prevent the sharing of information. States and local governments should be encouraged to work through these barriers so that at-risk youth may receive more individualized care.

- **Schools provide a venue and an opportunity to identify young people who are potentially at risk.**

As previously stated, youth violence is on the decline. More specifically, schools are safer places for children relative to other locations in the community. The perception that schools are unsafe, however, can cause an uneasiness and anxiety among children. As a result, we can take positive steps to further reduce youth violence in schools and assure students that the classroom is a safe place to be. Schools provide a tremendous opportunity to interact with our youth and positively contribute to their personal development. It is an opportunity that must not be missed. Community outreach to show that schools are safe, stable learning environments should be an important part of the effort to make them a haven for our youth.

- **Congress should only fund programs of demonstrated effectiveness, and such programs should be evaluated on an ongoing basis as a condition of continued funding.**

Researchers have developed an increasing body of knowledge as to which programs are effective in reducing youth violence and which are not. Congress should ensure that federal support is directed toward programs that work, and should require ongoing evaluation as a condition of continued support. It is also important that Congress encourage continued research to enable local partnerships to identify and replicate successful programs.

The following report provides a more thorough discussion of the six areas reviewed by the subgroups. In each section, these themes can be found in the examples cited by various experts, and in the recommendations made by the Working Group.

### III. Parents and Families

The Working Group tasked this subgroup with examining the following factors involving the impact of parents and families on the problem of youth violence: strong family relationships; single parent families; welfare dependency; parental responsibility; peer influences; mentoring programs; child care; role models: parents, family, friends.

The subgroup submitted its presentation to the full Bipartisan Working Group on Youth Violence on September 15, 1999. The meeting featured expert testimony from Dr. Laurence Steinberg, Professor of Psychology at Temple University and a nationally recognized authority on the issues of adolescence and youth violence. Below are consensus items which the Members of the subgroup recommend the full Bipartisan Working Group accept.

**Strong family relationships.** Although there is no single cause for youth violence, the most common factor is family dysfunction. Domestic violence and conflict/tension within the family are often associated with troubled youth. Abuse, neglect and hostility are prevalent in cases of youth violence. Exposure to violence leads to acceptance of violence as a means to solve problems. Research demonstrates that this develops into the cycle of violence.

**The importance of strong family relationships to the healthy growth and development cannot be overstated.** In fact, the Members of the subgroup strongly support issuing a clear statement that no one will ever have a more important responsibility than the responsibility to raise their children in a healthy, secure, nurturing environment. Likewise, the public sector, the private sector and the non-profit community all have a responsibility to help parents obtain the skills and resources they need to meet those obligations.

**The Members of the subgroup recommend that the federal government should launch a national public health campaign to raise awareness of the importance of raising healthy children and the key role of parenting in this effort. The Working Group should strongly endorse this recommendation.** Congress should enlist the Surgeon General, and other public health officials as well as the non-profit and private sectors to support this campaign.

**Single parent families.** The subgroup identified no direct, causal link between single parent families and youth violence. However, the lack of parenting skills and knowledge of child development was identified as a serious risk factor for unhealthy youth development.

**The subgroup supports the teaching of such parenting skills that formerly were taught in such classes as Home Economics, life sciences/skills, and personal health.** We should also use public health agencies like WIC, pre-natal care clinics, and visiting nurses to reach out to mothers in need to help them gain the knowledge they need to raise healthy children. We need to teach parents how to parent. And we need to help all children in the pre-school years. Although ambitious efforts such as Head Start, Even Start and CHIPs exist, we need to address the gaps in education and health care that fail to reach children's needs.

**Welfare Dependency.** Although welfare itself was not a central focus of the panel's work, Dr. Steinberg stated clearly that poverty is the number one cause of negative parenting. Economic stress raises all other risk factors.

**The subgroup should state clearly and concisely its finding that a strong national economy is essential to our progress on the challenge of youth violence.** In these times of economic prosperity, we too easily forget that social problems like youth violence are exacerbated dramatically during times of economic hardship. We should use this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to a national economic policy of providing every family in America the opportunity to succeed economically through hard work.

**Parental Responsibility.** (see above.) The latchkey factor is not necessarily indicative of a child with a propensity toward violence. Rather, negative parenting is the biggest factor. Statistics indicate that the prevalence of parental disengagement is 25-30 percent and one-quarter of American adolescents are not sure that their parents love them. Parental engagement is the single most important factor in a child's healthy development.

Character education that involves the parents can help children to develop a healthy sense of self and self-worth. Schools can be a focal point to strengthen the relationship between parents and children through such joint efforts as character education. Character education integrated throughout the curriculum can help children develop and strengthen basic values such as honesty, integrity, courage, respect for self and others, perseverance, kindness, etc. that will help them to become good citizens as well as good students.

**Peer Influences.** With young people, peer relationships are a key factor because youths tend to offend and take offense in groups. All efforts to reach young people must recognize this central fact and work within the reality of the social structure of the youth culture.

Youth-run adjudication and remediation systems can be successful in encouraging youth to take responsibility for their actions and to demand better from their peers.

**Mentoring Programs.** The single most important influence in the healthy development of the child is positive interaction with adults. Mentors can play a key role especially for at-risk youths whose family situations can contribute significantly to the propensity for violence.

Too often today, communities are disconnected from families. Many organizations – such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, boosters, etc. -- perform important mentoring functions. The Working Group should endorse increased support for locally-based mentoring efforts.

**Child Care.** The subgroup did not focus on the child care of pre-school children because it was not identified as a risk factor beyond the above-stated importance of child services. However, study after study have shown the hours of 3-6 PM each day is the key time for youth trouble. Likewise, studies have shown conclusively that the two most dangerous school days of the year are Prom Night and Graduation Day. In North Carolina, schools have utilized low

levels of federal funds to promote adult-supervised Lock-In for students to have an all-night, alcohol- and drug-free event. The results in safety improvement are dramatic.

**The subgroup recommends increased support for initiatives that help families and students coordinate the differing schedules of school and work.** This could come in the form of support for extended day schools. Studies have shown that teenagers need additional sleep to function optimally. In some areas, high schools are experimenting with school days that start and end later in the day.

**Role Models.** The absence of strong role models inhibits a child's character growth. As mentioned above, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and similar initiatives help at-risk youth develop healthy relationships with adults necessary for healthy growth.

The Working Group should endorse stronger support for role model initiatives.

**Other.** Although some federal effort exists to coordinate information, such as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's National Clearinghouse on Youth Violence, there is a need to expand the effort to include parenting. An inter-agency clearinghouse could better identify and disseminate information about the full range of related efforts. The relevant House Committees should investigate the agencies' current practices and encourage better coordination of efforts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The importance of strong family relationships to the healthy growth and development cannot be overstated.
- The Members of the subgroup recommend that the federal government should launch a national public health campaign to raise awareness of the importance of raising healthy children and the key role of parenting in this effort. The Working Group should strongly endorse this recommendation.
- The subgroup supports the teaching of such parenting skills that formerly were taught in such classes as Home Economics, life sciences/skills, and personal health.
- The Working Group should state clearly and concisely its finding that a strong national economy is essential to our progress on the challenge of youth violence.
- Parental engagement is the single most important factor in a child's healthy development.
- The single most important influence in the healthy development of the child is positive interaction with adults. Mentors can play a key role especially for at-risk youths whose family situations can contribute significantly to the propensity for violence.
- The subgroup recommends increased support for initiatives that help families and students coordinate the differing schedules of school and work.

## **ADDITIONAL VIEWS**

While Congressman Etheridge strongly supports the bipartisan effort that has produced these consensus items, he feels strongly that the bottom line is commitment. We must engage in making a national commitment to address the problem of youth violence. Congressman Stupak specified that we need a commitment for an entire generation. Congressman McKeon stressed that the problem was not created overnight and it will not be fixed overnight.

## IV. Law Enforcement

The Law Enforcement Working Subgroup was asked to develop recommendations regarding the role of law enforcement agencies and officials (including police, prosecutors, judges, parole and probation officers and corrections officials) in reducing youth violence in America.

The subgroup convened a round table discussion on September 15, 1999 to solicit the views of a wide range of outside experts (listed on Appendix A). The presentations revealed a number of recurring themes which the subgroup believes represent substantial consensus within the law enforcement community on the causes and prevention of youth violence, and which provided a foundation for the subgroups recommendations.

Law enforcement officials are uniquely positioned to take a leadership role in forging relationships with parents, educators, community- and faith-based organizations, and social service agencies. These types of efforts can help identify at-risk youth, educate them on the seriousness of criminal activity, and prevent them from committing crimes, or graduating to more serious criminal offenses.

The federal government can play an important role in support of these efforts. However, it is important that federal funds be directed toward programs that get results, and that federally-supported programs be subject to rigorous evaluation.

Once a youth enters the juvenile justice system, it is important that he or she be provided with meaningful contact that administers an appropriate balance between sanctions and individualized services. This requires the removal of barriers that impede effective information sharing among law enforcement, educators, social service agencies, and the juvenile justice system.

Finally, law enforcement efforts must acknowledge the importance of the youth's family in the juvenile justice system, and must enlist the full participation of parents or guardians if interventions are going to be successful.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **1. Law enforcement must take a leadership role in developing community partnerships.**

Law enforcement officials are often the first point of contact between troubled youth and the community. This places them in a position to provide leadership and support to community-wide collaborative efforts to reduce youth violence.

Many youthful offenders have been found to suffer from multiple risk factors such as parental abuse and neglect, poor nutrition, academic failure, low self-esteem, and unsupervised

discretionary time. To prevent their further involvement with the criminal justice system, law enforcement agencies have a vital role to play in building partnerships that bring to bear the full resources of the community on the needs of at-risk youth.

Such targeted, collaborative efforts have been shown to be effective in reducing youth violence in the community. These efforts should include the training and deployment of school resource officers, including medical and social work professionals, who are able to identify those at risk and to intervene before they cause harm to themselves or others. Community partnerships can also aid schools in promoting extracurricular activities that emphasize personal responsibility and service to others.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress provide incentives to encourage community-wide efforts to combat youth crime.**

- 2. Law enforcement agencies need to be able to collect and access up-to-date criminal history information. This information should be made available to social service agencies and educators (to the extent permitted by state confidentiality rules with respect to juvenile records) and should be accessible across jurisdictional and geographical boundaries.**

Educators, prosecutors, judges, and law enforcement officers agree that access to juvenile records and information must be improved. While issues of privacy must remain paramount, lack of timely access to complete and accurate juvenile records frustrates law enforcement efforts to reduce juvenile crime. This is also a problem for the courts. Judge Patricia West, a juvenile court judge from Virginia, stated in her presentation that the lack of information regarding prior criminal history makes it difficult for judges to make appropriate sentencing determinations

Improving access to information will also assist prosecutors and other law enforcement officials in combatting gang violence. The success of Boston's Operation Night Light was attributable in large part to information sharing with other jurisdictions to track the movement of gang members and prevent them from slipping through the cracks.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress provide grant assistance to state and local agencies, and regional consortia, for multi-jurisdictional case management and information sharing efforts.**

- 3. Effective solutions require the involvement of parents and families.**

Law enforcement efforts that enlist the active involvement of parents and guardians are among the most successful and cost-effective strategies for early intervention and prevention. Such strategies include truancy and home visitation programs.

Research has shown that many juvenile delinquents begin their involvement with crime as truants. Efforts to prevent and reduce truancy can be useful in identifying children at risk of delinquency and crime and offer a cost-effective approach for reducing the incidence of youth

violence. The Brooklyn truancy program, T.R.A.C.K., has, as its central component, a requirement that parents or guardians be contacted at the time a child is brought into the program. Parents must pick up their children from truancy centers and return them to school, and are counseled on their responsibility to monitor and support their child's academic performance. The goal of T.R.A.C.K. is to make students responsible and parents accountable for attendance in school and, therefore, to cut down on juvenile crime and protect public safety. The benefits of this program during its first year were significant. In three of the precincts where T.R.A.C.K. operated there was a 23.4% reduction in serious crimes (i.e. rape, robbery, assault and larceny) where youth were victims.

Home visitation programs are another effective means of enlisting parental involvement in reducing truancy and more serious delinquency by focusing on parenting skills and family health needs. A 1997 report by the National Institute of Justice (Lawrence Sherman et al., *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*) found that home visits by nurses can produce major reductions in child abuse, which is a risk factor for later delinquency. A RAND study reported that home visits are more cost effective than prison in reducing crime.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress provide support for early interventions that enlist the active participation of parents and families, including truancy and home visitation programs.**

**4. Law enforcement officials can play an important role within the schools by serving as mentors and educators.**

Another way in which law enforcement officials can prevent youth violence is by serving as mentors, instructors, and resource officers in the schools. Through school-based programs, law enforcement personnel can work in partnership with school administrators to identify at-risk youth and offer them positive role models. They can help students to understand the justice system and to appreciate the consequences of violence. In Bellevue, Washington, local law enforcement, educators, and medical professionals have instituted a program called "Cops and Docs," the purpose of which is to help young people understand that violence has consequences for the victim, the victim's family, and society as a whole.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress continue to provide funds for school resource officers and other programs that bring law enforcement personnel into the schools as mentors and instructors.**

**5. Federal law enforcement dollars should go to crime prevention programs that work.**

Researchers have developed an increasing body of knowledge as to which programs are effective in reducing youth violence and which are not. Congress should ensure that federal support is directed toward programs that work, and should require ongoing evaluation as a condition of continued support. It is also important that Congress encourage continued research to enable local partnerships to identify and replicate successful programs.

Additionally, Congress should provide funding for training and technical assistance to local law enforcement agencies, including assistance in developing programs and accessing federal funds.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress fund only programs of demonstrated effectiveness, and that such programs be evaluated on an ongoing basis as a condition of continued funding. The subgroup further recommends that Congress provide increased funding for research and evaluation, and for technical assistance to local law enforcement agencies in developing effective programs and obtaining federal support.**

**6. Prevention and early intervention programs provide a continuum of care that can help prevent at-risk youth from graduating to violent criminal activity.**

All available evidence indicates that a small minority of all young people commit the great majority of violent crimes. A cost-effective prevention strategy is therefore one that targets resources to at-risk youth and their families before these young people become involved in gang activity and violent crime. Effective strategies include such elements as prenatal health care for at-risk mothers, home visitation by nurses and preschool teachers, family therapy, parent training, teaching of social competency skills, and afterschool programs that provide supervised recreational and educational activities during the high crime hours from 3pm-6pm.

Such efforts must also involve the schools. Law enforcement officers can work with school administrators to create a safer, more nurturing school environment, alternative educational programs for students unable to function in the regular classroom, and supervised after-school activities.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress provide increased support for a range of prevention and early intervention strategies targeted toward at-risk youth and their families, including school-based and after-school programs.**

**7. Graduated sanctions and alternative sentencing (including restorative justice programs and mental health and drug treatment) ensure juvenile accountability.**

If society is to prevent recidivism, youthful offenders must be held accountable for their actions. Unfortunately, their first encounter with the juvenile justice system often teaches them the opposite lesson that the first felony is free. Both Edward J. Loughran, Executive Director of the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, and Juvenile Court Judge Patricia West emphasized the importance of a meaningful contact or sanction each time a juvenile encounters the system.

Where appropriate, the court should consider mental health and drug treatment programs as alternatives to incarceration. "Restorative justice" is another sentencing alternative, which focuses on the moral duty of offenders to repair the harm they have caused. According to Professor Lawrence Sherman, such programs have been shown to reduce repeat violence by 50 percent.

One program in Seattle, Washington, known as the Conference Committee Diversion Program of King County Superior Court, assigns concerned citizens to interview the offender and his or her parents and decide upon an accountability plan. The plan, put in the form of a legally binding

contract, may include community service, skill building classes, counseling, restitution, or fines. When the youth signs, he or she agrees to fulfill the terms of the contract, or be remanded to juvenile court. The program has had an enormous impact on young offenders, and 92% successfully complete their contract.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress make incentive grants to states to implement graduated sanctions and alternative sentencing structures such as "restorative justice" that ensure juvenile accountability. In addition, Congress should encourage the establishment of programs for the treatment of young offenders who require mental health or substance abuse services.**

**8. Post-adjudication programs help to stem recidivism.**

Post-adjudication programs including supervised parole, probation, mentoring, community reintegration and aftercare are important tools for stemming recidivism. Effective programs can help juvenile offenders become reintegrated into society and teach them to be responsible members of the community.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress provide grants for post-adjudication aftercare programs that reduce recidivism.**

**9. Resources should be targeted toward neighborhoods with the highest levels of youth violence.**

Juvenile violence can occur in every community, but it remains concentrated in major cities. While political realities often require that federal law enforcement funds be distributed more broadly, the most effective use of these funds is to target them on areas with high crime rates (assuming these funds will be used in a cost-effective manner as previously described above). Since this proposal would have consequences for state and local government funding, however, it should be carefully considered.

**The subgroup recommends that Congress further explore directing a greater proportion of law enforcement assistance funding toward high crime areas.**

## APPENDIX A

### OUTSIDE EXPERTS CONSULTED BY THE LAW ENFORCEMENT SUBGROUP

The following guest speakers participated in a roundtable discussion on September 15 with Reps. Dunn, Scott, Barr and Delahunt. Their presentations and written materials were used by the Law Enforcement Working Group in developing its findings and recommendations.

Steve Harris, Chief of Police, City of Redmond, Washington

Patricia L. West, Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, State of Virginia

\* Dr. Lawrence Sherman, Criminologist/ Professor at University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Peter Sheras, Clinical Psychologist/ Professor at University of Virginia

\* Mike Powell, Officer, Marietta Police Department

David Whitfield, Principal, Paulding High School

\* Charles J. (Joe) Hynes, the District Attorney for King's County (Brooklyn), New York  
Ned Loughran, former director of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, currently  
Executive Director of the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators

\* Presenters at formal full Working Group Meeting, September 22, 1999.

## V. Schools

The Schools Working Subgroup convened a roundtable discussion on Sept. 29, 1999. Ms. Betsy Goulet, Children's Advisor to Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan; Mr. John Porter, Principal, T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia; and Mr. Lynn Coleman, Assistant to the Mayor of South Bend, Indiana joined the Subgroup in discussing the problem of violence in schools and how to properly address it. We also held meetings in our districts and gathered the most recently published research.

What emerged from this roundtable were some common themes. First, high quality early childhood experiences are critical. Second, since children spend the majority of their time in school, it is important that the federal government focus its resources and attention on in-school programs. Third, a caring adult can make a difference. A teacher or mentor who takes an interest in an at-risk child may be able to turn him or her around. Finally, the federal government should help states and communities identify and implement successful violence prevention programs.

All of us recognize that there is no easy solution to the problem of juvenile violence—there is no magic wand that will make our schools safer. But we all agree that Congress can contribute to help making our schools safer and our children more secure.

### FINDINGS

#### **A. Early childhood development is vital and probably the most important thing that we can do to prevent school violence.**

During the roundtable discussion, Ms. Goulet said that because children have set behavior problems by age eight or nine, preschool experiences are vital and probably the most important thing that we can do to prevent school violence. Programs targeting young children, even infants and toddlers, could provide a way to reduce the likelihood of juvenile violence.

Research suggests that a child's early years are critical in the development of the brain because early brain development is an important component of mental, educational, and intellectual achievement. Of all three to five-year-olds not in kindergarten, less than half are enrolled in an early education program. Even worse, only 36 percent of children from families with annual incomes below \$15,000 are enrolled in an early education program.

Evaluation of high quality early education programs demonstrate that, compared to children with similar backgrounds who have not participated in early education programs, children who participate in such programs:

Perform better on reading and mathematics achievement tests  
Are more likely to stay academically near their grade level and make normal academic progress throughout elementary school  
Are less likely to be held back a grade or require special education services in elementary school  
Show greater learning retention, initiative, creativity, and social competency

Are more enthusiastic about school and are more likely to have good attendance records

Are less likely to participate in delinquent activities later in life

There are a number of federal programs, the largest of which is Head Start, that provide comprehensive early childhood development, educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to low-income preschool children and their families. These services are intended to prepare children to enter kindergarten and to improve the conditions necessary for their success in later school and life.

Head Start strongly emphasizes the involvement of families and the local community to assure that programs are responsive to the unique needs of each community. In general, Head Start operates a part-day program during the school year, although some local Head Start programs coordinate with other programs to provide all-day care.

Since a child's health and well-being play equally important roles in his or her education a prenatal health focus is equally important. Healthy Start provides a variety of services to low-income pregnant women, such as family planning counseling, pregnancy testing, prenatal care, pediatric care for infants, and social services. Other services appropriate to a community's needs may include outreach, home visits, child care, transportation, dental care, nutrition counseling, mental health, and substance abuse services.

Effective federal programs must be fully funded to achieve the largest impact on early childhood development and, ultimately, youth violence. Studies have estimated that for every dollar invested in quality early education, about seven dollars are saved in later costs.

Programs with proven track records in helping at-risk youth in the past should be studied for their applicability to today's at-risk youth. One notable example is the Perry Preschool Program, conducted in Michigan in the 1960's and designed as a high-quality, active-learning preschool program for children born into poverty. Results indicate that as adults, those who had participated in the program at age three or four experienced half as many criminal arrests, higher income earnings and property wealth, and a greater commitment to marriage than did those who were not participants in the program.

The Perry Preschool study attests to the significant long term social benefits that accrued when low-income families were included in high quality preschool programs. Every effort

should be made to determine if its success might be replicated through programs in other areas of the country.

*Recommendation:*

Congress should increase funding for high quality, effective early childhood programs, evaluate all federally-subsidized early childhood programs, and identify areas for improvement and areas where innovative new ideas could be implemented.

**B. Although schools are still the safest places for children to be, additional actions should be taken to improve school safety and security for the long term.**

Compared with other public situations, schools remain some of the safest places for young people. In the most recent school year, 1997-98, 34 school-associated violent deaths of students took place nationwide. Because these incidents are so rare, they are covered heavily by the media, resulting in a perception that such violence is commonplace. The reality is young people face greater dangers outside of the school, in their communities and when at home.

Although such school-related violence is rare, a risk does exist and schools should be a safe place to be. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 57% of public schools reported at least one crime in the 1996-1997 school year; 10% reported at least one serious violent crime.

Where violence at school once involved only fists, it now often includes a greater use of violence. Although the chance of an incident of violence taking place at any one school is remote, there is a risk. It is incumbent upon public officials to ensure that schools remain safe places of learning.

The climate at a school—whether students feel safe, connected and supported so that they can learn—is as important, and possibly more important, than the physical security of the school. It may be possible to develop climate assessment tools for the use of schools and communities so that they may identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to improve climate and reduce the risk of both major and minor incidents of violence in schools. It may also be useful to develop and make readily available security assessment tools that schools may use for self-assessment.

Furthermore, during his presentation, Mr. Porter said students need to feel safe about reporting possible incidences of school violence. Anonymous hotlines and websites have helped many schools across the country to provide this anonymity for the students and to notify the administration of problems. Schools have found great success through partnerships with local law enforcement officials. Agencies that designate school resource officers can offer a crucial link between police and educators. These links should be encouraged.

Mr. Porter also emphasized the need for smaller schools to reduce youth violence. Based on studies of secondary school violence, researchers have concluded that an important step in

ending school violence is to break through the impersonal atmosphere of larger secondary schools and create smaller communities of learning within larger structures. Behavioral problems, including truancy, classroom disruption, vandalism, aggressive behavior, theft, substance abuse, and gang participation are greater in larger schools. Teachers in smaller schools learn of disagreements between students and can resolve problems before problems become severe.

School size also plays a very important role in shaping the kinds of social relationships that form within schools. Smaller schools and learning communities reduce the isolation that causes violence and allow students to form closer relationships with their teachers and create a sense of ownership and belonging to their school. Young people who feel more connected to their school are less likely to be involved in violence.

Research also demonstrates that students attending smaller schools are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, and studies show that students who participate in extracurricular activities are less likely to engage in violent acts. At smaller schools, the students are also involved in a greater variety of activities, while at larger schools students tend to be polarized into two groups: those who participate in extracurricular activities and those who do not.

Smaller schools, schools-within-schools, and smaller learning communities are some ways to create a climate where students feel safe, connected and supported in their schools. And finally, every school should develop a comprehensive safety plan, including methods of detection and intervention. While each must tailor its plan to its own needs, model plans from other schools and districts can be helpful.

*Recommendations:*

*Congress should establish a “School Security Technology Center” as a resource to local educational agencies for school security assessments, security technology development, technology availability and implementation, and technical assistance relating to improving school security.*

*Congress should make funds available to State and Local Education Agencies to develop smaller schools, schools-within-schools, and/or smaller learning communities in order to create a climate where students feel safe, connected and supported.*

*Congress should allow grants received under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act to be used to establish and maintain school violence hotlines and websites.*

**C. Often one adult can make a difference by taking an interest in a child and nurturing him or her. This might be a teacher, an administrator, a counselor, or others.**

Students with behavior disorders account for a majority of problems encountered in schools today. Additional resource staff in our schools, such as counselors, school psychologists, and social workers are needed, not only to help identify these troubled youth, but to work on developmental skill building.

There is no real infrastructure of support for our kids when it comes to mental health services in our schools and no national models for how best to structure school community mental health programs. Currently, there are only 90,000 school counselors for approximately 41.4 million students in our public schools—roughly 1 counselor for every 513 students. In California, there is only one counselor for more than 1,000 students. That is simply not enough. As Mr. Porter stated during his presentation, current school counselors are unable to address students' mental health needs since they are responsible for such large numbers of students. Instead, their role is relegated to administrative, scheduling, and career counseling.

Additional resource staff is needed to address specifically the personal, family, peer level, emotional, and developmental needs of students. By focusing on these mental health needs, these staff members will pick up early warning signs of troubled youth and improve student interaction and school safety.

The resource staff can also provide consultation with teachers and parents about student learning, behavior and emotional problems. They can develop and implement prevention programs, deal with substance abuse, set up peer mediation, and enhance problem-solving skills in schools. In short, resource staff can provide important support services to students, parents, and teachers.

There are a number of different ways to enhance the availability of emotional support and mental health services in schools. Schools can partner with community-based mental health organizations or enhance staff training by providing more opportunities at school for the development of informal adult-child mentoring relationships. We expect that there are a number of models that may vary in effectiveness at different schools and age levels. The federal government should initially support the development of research-based models for school mental health programs that could then be built upon.

Furthermore, schools and communities should incorporate programs that encourage parents to become involved in their child's education. Improving parenting skills through federally-funded programs like WIC, TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, public health clinics, teen parenting, child welfare, juvenile delinquency and homeless programs may be an effective way to reduce juvenile violence in the long term.

Finally, teacher quality has been shown to have a profound impact on the success of a child. Because teachers are on the front line, there is a great need to help them understand how to identify and intervene in the life of a troubled child. Studies indicate that by the school year 2008-2009, we will need an additional two million teachers in our schools. We can ensure that we have quality teachers in the future by creating incentives for educators to continue teaching

and by encouraging people to begin teaching after careers in other professions through such programs which help mid-career professionals become teachers.

Recommendations:

*Congress should provide grants to States and local educational agencies to recruit, train, and hire school-based resource staff, such as school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers.*

*Congress should authorize the Department of Health and Human Services to work with schools and the mental health community in developing models that enhance the availability of mental health services in schools.*

*Congress should encourage local educational agencies to implement professional development activities designed to assist teachers in identifying and assisting at-risk youth.*

*Congress should authorize the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education to develop a public awareness campaign aimed toward parental involvement in schools.*

**D. Through increased research and outreach efforts, the federal government should help states and communities learn which violence prevention programs are likely to succeed and help make them a reality.**

Parents, working with school officials and community members, can become the most effective deterrent to youth violence. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, the crime rate can decrease by as much as 30 percent when a violence prevention initiative is implemented with community-wide support.

Children need safe places to be and constructive things to do from 3 to 6 p.m. while many parents are still at work. Experts estimate that almost five million school-age children spend time without adult supervision during a typical week and that these children are more likely to engage in risky behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activity, loitering on street corners, and truancy.

Many parents report that they would like to enroll their children in after-school enrichment activities, but they are prevented from doing so by prohibitive costs, transportation difficulties, and worries about neighborhood safety. Although there are many outstanding programs for the nation's youth, they are not available in all areas. Congress needs to take steps to ensure that every child has access to a high quality after-school activity.

In addition, school curriculum must include a constant theme of ethical values. Strong themes of good character, including honesty, citizenship, courage, justice, respect, personal responsibility, and trustworthiness, must permeate through the instruction of our children.

Finally, the Working Group found that just one caring adult in a child's life can make a difference. Again, mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters and intergenerational programs, should be promoted. Partnerships between schools and these initiatives should also be emphasized.

Recommendation:

*Congress should, 1) provide grants to improve the quality and availability of after-school programs; 2) establish a national clearinghouse to provide technical assistance regarding the establishment and operation of after-school programs and models of after-school programs such as the collaboration with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program in South Bend, Indiana; and 3) authorize a GAO report containing information on how to improve the quality and availability of after-school programs.*

*Congress should authorize block grant funding to establish partnerships between State and local agencies for character education programs that incorporate elements of good character including honesty, citizenship, courage, justice, respect, personal responsibility, and trustworthiness.*

*Congress should instruct the Secretary of Education to enter into a contract with the National Academy of Sciences for the purposes of conducting a study regarding the antecedents of school violence in urban, suburban, and rural schools.*

## **CONCLUSION**

Perhaps the best way to summarize our views is to quote Ron Stephens, director of the National School Safety Center. He said, "A safe school is a place where students can learn and teachers can teach in a welcoming environment, free of intimidation and fear. It is a setting where the educational climate fosters a spirit of acceptance and care for every child, where behavior expectations are clearly communicated, consistently enforced and fairly applied. Unlimited options and potential exist for safe school planning. It requires only the ability to get started."

Early childhood development, effective school safety programs, increased adult interactions, and supporting and strengthening effective federal programs all have their important place addressing the problem of juvenile violence. However, they are only a piece of the puzzle. The members of this subgroup feel there are other areas, outside the jurisdiction of this subgroup, which will play a vital part in addressing the problem of youth violence.

## **ADDITIONAL VIEWS**

Submitted by Mrs. Wilson

## **Early Childhood Education and Development**

This report over emphasizes Head Start and Healthy Start as programmatic solutions while not mentioning a host of other federal programs that impact early childhood development.

The most recent research clearly indicates that Head Start--which targets 4 and 5 year olds--doesn't start early enough. While it is an important federal program, there is no evidence that Healthy Start or pre-natal programs reduce juvenile violence.

There is, however, a growing body of research that says high quality early childhood experiences that are developmentally appropriate have a positive social impact on children later in life. There is some evidence that Head Start in some regions has not had the positive impacts generated by other early childhood programs. In addition, the focus on Head Start overlooks other federally funded child care support programs associated with TANF, food stamps and other education and training programs that collectively impact more children than Head Start in most States. In many cases, this federally subsidized care supports low quality or even harmful early development or child care programs.

The Congress should evaluate all of the federally funded early childhood education and development programs, including but not limited to Head Start, to improve quality, afford ability, and accessibility.

### **Mental Health in the Schools**

The report over emphasizes the importance of guidance counselors and increasing "resource staff" in schools without any evidence that this is the best way to improve mental health in the schools. There are many models for providing mental health service to children that involve the schools, but few of them rely solely on school "resource staff."

An appropriate federal role would be to develop research based models for school mental health programs which schools nationwide might then draw upon to fit their unique circumstances. We should resist the one-size-fits-all answer that "more guidance counselors" seems to offer.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Dunn, Martin J. "Critical Elements in School Security." 1999 School Security.

Ellerman, Chris. June, 1996. "The Government and Religious Charities: A Vision for Partnership."

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Illinois*. Resource guide.

Generations Together. September, 1995. "Senior Citizen School Volunteer Program: Report on Cumulative Data for 1988-1995."

Generations United. Resource guide.

Goulet, Betsy. "Safe to Learn." Office of the Illinois Attorney General.

HRI + Pfeiffer: The Health Research Institute and Pfeiffer Treatment Center. Resource guide.

Illinois Center for Violence Prevention. Resource guide

Illinois Violence Prevention Authority. Resource guide.

Oak Park Township Youth Services. Resource guides.

Overview: Juvenile Courts in Illinois. Illinois Department of Corrections.

"The First 'R': Reflective Capacities." August, 1999. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wiseman, Bruce. "Psychiatry and the Creation of Senseless Violence." Citizens Commission on Human Rights

Kalonsky, Michael. "Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story." 1996. University of Illinois at Chicago.

Cotton, Kathleen. "School Size, School Climate, & Student Performance." September 1997. Northwest Reg

Cotton, Kathleen. "Effective and Social Benefits of Small Scale Schooling." Clearing House on Rural Education

Lashway, Larry. "School Size: Is Small Better?" Research Roundup. Winter 1998-1999.  
National Association of Elementary Schools Principals.

Latarola, Patrice. "Effects of Size of Student Body on School Costs." Education, States, & Nations.

Newsweek special edition, "From Birth to Three," Spring/Summer 1997

Bailey, Robert. "Youth Violence and Mental Health" Presentation at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. August 18, 1999.

Smith, Laura. "Behavioral and Emotional Characteristics of Children in the Bernalillo County Juvenile Deten

Perry, Bruce. "The Effects of Traumatic Events on Children: Materials for Parents," Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. Baylor School of Medicine. 1994.

"Brain Facts" [www.iamyourchild.org](http://www.iamyourchild.org)

## VI. CHARITABLE AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

The Charitable and Community Initiatives Subgroup convened a round table discussion on September 28th. The Subgroup made its presentation to the full Working Group on October 6th. Mr. Howard Davidson, Director, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law; Dr. Brian Flynn, Director of Program Development, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, HHS; Dr. David Murray, Research Director, Statistical Assessment Services (STATS); Mr. Pat Nolan, President, Justice Fellowship; Ms. Miriam A. Rollin, Director of Public Policy, National Network for Youth; and Mr. Mark Soler, President, Youth Law Center joined the Subgroup in the presentation.

The presenters raised various issues at the round table discussion. These issues included encouraging partnerships of families, charitable, community, and faith-based organizations, and schools; promoting interagency collaboration at the federal level to effectively reduce duplication of efforts and pool available resources; making resources available to faith-based organizations; supporting the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise; and encouraging national service for youth.

As our communities struggle to deal with the dramatic rise in youth violence, the search for some effective ways to prevent this scourge on our children has become a national priority. Keeping this in mind, we should not be hasty in trying to find quick solutions to such a complex problem. We agree with those who call for changes to occur, but there are numerous factors that need to be considered involving this matter, from school safety programs, to encouraging more active community involvement, to a culture that seems to perpetuate the popularity of violence.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. Charitable and community initiatives should foster family relationships.**

The evidence for programs that focus on family relationships and functioning is quite strong and consistent. The most successful family interventions involve programs with multiple components that address not only the individual at risk but the internal dynamics of the family and the family's involvement in the neighborhood, school, and with their children's peer groups.

Because of this, charitable and community-based organizations should focus their efforts on strengthening marriages, and maintaining and rebuilding families. This should include counseling, family management, and parenting skills programs. Congress should also include initiatives to help promote responsible fatherhood.

#### **2. Charitable and community initiatives should build competencies among youth, particularly focusing on problem-solving, moral reasoning, decision making, self-control, job and academic skills.**

In general, individual-level approaches that modify or enhance personal and social competencies like problem-solving skills, moral reasoning, decision making skills, self-control, and academic or job-related skills are effective if they are high quality, well implemented programs.

3. Charitable and community initiatives should promote parental supervision and/or access to after-school programs during the peak hours for youth crime of 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Too often, children return after school to an empty home or to the streets. An estimated 5 to 7 million "latchkey" children go home alone after school. Children who are unsupervised during the after-school hours are more likely to engage in delinquent and other high-risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drugs. After-school programs can provide safe, drug-free, supervised, and cost-effective havens for children.

Demand for after-school initiatives is high. Quality after-school programs can provide adult supervision of children during after-school hours, and they can provide children with healthy alternatives to/insulation from risk-taking and delinquent behavior. After school programs also provide a prime opportunity to increase learning because the environment can motivate and inspire learning outside of the regular school day.

Examples of quality after-school programs include tutoring and supplementing instruction in basic skills like arithmetic, reading, and science; drug and violence prevention curricula and counseling; youth leadership activities; volunteer and community service opportunities; college awareness and preparation; homework assistance centers; courses and enrichment in the arts and culture; computer instruction; abstinence education; and employment preparation and training, among others. After-school programs should use community resources effectively by establishing partnerships or developed networks to give children even more options for after-school learning enrichment and recreation. Law enforcement officials can be strong community partners, serving as role models and mentors in programs.

Because of this, we agree with the nation's police chiefs that after-school programs for youngsters are a more effective way to fight crime. Recently, George Mason University conducted a survey in the aftermath of the massacre at Columbine High School, which showed that nearly nine of 10 police chiefs believe expanding after-school programs and providing educational child-care programs such as Head Start would greatly reduce youth crime and violence. The survey was sponsored by "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids" which has lobbied for more funding for after-school programs and other community-based efforts that help identify troubled children before they have problems with the law.

We agree with many of the law enforcement and academic community that the best kind of intervention programs are character education programs, law-related education classes, counseling geared toward conflict resolution, staff development for teachers in identifying and dealing with troubled youth, peer helper programs, home visitor programs for at risk families, and required programs for parents and children who commit major offenses in school.

In some cases, the problem is with the schools themselves; in that some schools close immediately after the end of classes. We need to encourage all schools to stay open late and to offer after-school opportunities such as sports, band, etc.

Recently, ABC News' 20/20 ran a story about schools in Texas and New York which requires its teachers, parents and students to sign a pledge committing themselves to the education of the child – 24 hours a day. We endorse this proposal and encourage all schools to adopt this fresh approach to education.

Quality after-school programs have strong leaders, skilled and qualified staff, and effective managers. Also, families of children in the program are informed of their child's activities and given opportunities to volunteer in their child's program. Programs set goals and use well-planned, continuous evaluations to judge themselves.

Since there is no "one-size-fits-all" youth violence prevention after-school program, each community needs to have a variety of youth initiatives to address their children's particular needs.

4. Charitable and community initiatives should assist youth and adults who have regular contact with youth in identifying troubled and potentially violent juveniles.

When elementary school children display disruptive behavior, it is a warning signal that it is time to start looking for the causes of the problem, and to provide the proven social skills training, counseling, and other help for the children and their families that can lead them back to healthier path.

Knowing what "risk factors" often contribute to youth violence is helpful in looking for warning signs. Research suggests that by exposing children to certain risk factors, communities create an environment conducive to violence, regardless of whether they are urban or rural, white or black, rich or poor. Among the 19 identified risk factors are exposure to violence in the media, easy availability of drugs and alcohol, community attitudes favorable to deviant behavior, family conflict and family management problems. While exposure to any or all of the factors does not mean a child will necessarily turn to violence, their presence increases the likelihood.

Being abused or neglected multiplies the risk that a child will grow up to be a violent teen or adult. In fact, children who experience violence – either directly or indirectly through witnessing violence – are 50% more likely to be arrested as juveniles and 40% more likely to be arrested as adults.

With almost three million American children reported as abused or neglected in 1995, we need to make sure that child protective services staff have sufficient resources to identify and treat abused and neglected children. We also must act before children are hurt by expanding the programs proven to reduce cases of abuse and neglect.

Making criminal justice funds available to prevent child abuse recognizes that preventing child abuse prevents crime. According to a 1992 Justice Department report, 60% of youths arrested had a prior history of abuse and neglect. The study also indicated that childhood abuse increased the odds of future delinquency and adult criminality overall by 40%.

The evaluations of successful child abuse prevention efforts have shown us that prevention works. Moreover, community-based programs supporting families can be implemented to prevent child abuse for far less dollars than it costs now to treat and manage the far-reaching consequences of child abuse and maltreatment.

Other successful endeavors include anonymous hotlines, which give students, parents, and teachers the opportunity to report threats of violence in their schools, and mentoring initiatives. Both of these initiatives are tremendous resources that students, parents and teachers can use to help ensure our schools are safe.

5. Charitable and community initiatives should increase recruitment of youth in community service and promote volunteerism.

Fifty-nine percent of youth ages 12 to 17 volunteered in 1995. These 13.3 million volunteers gave an estimated 3.5 hours a week. Youth volunteers reported that volunteering is important because it gives them a new perspective, allows them to do something for a cause that is important, and is an activity people respect. Youth say that through volunteer activities that they learn how to solve community problems and understand more about good citizenship.

Young people must be taught the skills they need to succeed. And they must be provided meaningful, challenging opportunities to contribute to their families, schools, churches, peers, and communities. This involvement helps them to feel responsible and significant and can also improve the situations of the families, schools, peers and communities. Third, young people should receive recognition for their efforts. Recognition rewards and motivates positive performance.

Therefore, effective youth violence prevention strategies provide opportunities for a relationship with a caring, responsible adult (parent or otherwise), together with opportunities for youth skill development, youth contributions to family, school, church, peers, and community, and positive recognition to youth.

These elements are incorporated in many successful youth violence prevention programs including: mentoring, recreation, counseling (individual, family, and group), employment and training, youth entrepreneurship, community service, tutoring, life skills (budgeting, consumer education, parenting, etc.), substance abuse prevention and treatment, and mental health treatment.

Again, there is no "one-size-fits-all" youth violence prevention solution. Each community needs to have an array of youth programs to address the variety of youth in their community. It is

important to remember that every community starts with a base of existing programs that differs from other communities, and programs that work in one community might not work in another.

6. Charitable and community-based organizations should improve the coordination of prevention and intervention programs.

Finally, we believe that charitable and community-based organizations should better manage their resources to help serve as many troubled youth as possible. We encourage inter-agency collaboration on youth violence initiatives to reduce duplication of efforts and pool resources.

We also believe that Congress should encourage a collaboration between federal agencies to establish a clearinghouse with a website listing all charitable and community-based organizations across the country. This will hopefully give local communities some examples of successful programs and better access to existing resources.

Federal initiatives should include linking preventative mental health activities with other violence prevention efforts; taking a school-based approach; engaging the entire community; including treatment services for children with more severe problems; and paying only for what has been demonstrated to work. The goals of a youth violence prevention program would facilitate community collaboration and assessment of risk for violence; develop and implement evidence-based programs or strategy for youth violence prevention; and evaluate the initiative or strategy.

#### OTHER VIEWS

The following statement is submitted by an individual member and does not represent a consensus of the Subgroup. However, we feel they are worthy of consideration by the full Bipartisan Working Group.

*Congressman Tom Tancredo*

The tragic events surrounding the shooting at Columbine High School have sent shock waves throughout many communities and the nation as a whole. Many of my constituents are rightfully concerned and have expressed their outrage at these actions and the need to address the problems which led to this violent assault by and on the youth of our community. At a time such as this, it is important to hear from people back in our districts for guidance and ideas for solutions that will ensure nothing like this tragedy occurs again. It is for this reason that earlier this year, I established a Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee back in my district comprising of experts from every field to help me in this endeavor.

The shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20<sup>th</sup> has left all of us heartbroken. It seems that there is no escape from the violence we are confronted with, and this event is a horrible reminder that no community is immune from the violence that has spread

across our country. It has changed our lives forever. But the question remains, what can Congress do to stop this from happening again? It is easy to blame one particular factor for the cause of the shootings, or look for a single remedy. Unfortunately, there is no one solution to this problem. In some circumstances, there are no answers. The reasons for this incident are not superficial, but instead rooted in the fabric of modern society.

Personally, I believe that an aspect that the Working Group should have focused on when addressing the lack of parental supervision between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. is that tax rates are too high, thus requiring both parents to work. We should focus on providing fundamental tax relief thus dramatically reducing the 40% tax burden currently placed on American families. By doing this, one parent would be able to stay at home to raise their children. Congress may also want to enact flex-time legislation, which will allow parents to spend time with their children instead of accepting overtime pay.

Finally, an overarching problem is that charitable and community-based organizations (including faith-based organizations) do not have the financial resources to carry out their missions. Therefore, I urge the government to provide for charitable choice in eligibility for Federal grants and provide tax incentives too charitable and community organizations.

While nothing Congress can do could ever alleviate the pain of the senseless acts carried out at Columbine High School and other areas around the country, we need to make sure that this never happens again. Communities should never have to face the horror of burying their children who were just beginning to spread their wings as young adults. We will do all in our power to see that these events come to an end.

## VII. Media and Popular Culture

The information age is accelerating the pace by which our individual and collective imaginations can be externalized in the forms of written word and graphic imagery, sent around the world at the speed of light. Parents and other adults responsible for the development of children should be vigilant about protecting them from exposure to inappropriate programming. Children can, and should, be taught age appropriate media literacy. The V-Chip, voluntary labeling systems, and FCC regulation of broadcast content have shown promise. Ultimately though, our children cannot be insulated from all violent imagery in the media. Instead they must be educated and nurtured in ways intended to protect them from its influence.

Media leaders should be asked to produce and distribute information that helps parents guide their children and understand the difference between drama and reality. Congress should consider incentives that encourage schools to present media literacy instruction and develop a character based curriculum at all grade levels. Congress can also fund the development and distribution of age-appropriate curricula and teaching aids. Video game producers should be encouraged to produce “trailers” that would proceed violent games with messages reminding users that violence in the real world has serious and lasting consequences.

Trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness and compassion are not controversial ideas. Parents should work together with their schools and their communities to teach young people about the importance of good character. Congress should encourage our schools to make character education a part of the curriculum. Everyone in the community, from teachers, youth leaders, and professional athletes to business leaders and clergy, has a responsibility to impart to our young people how important it is to have good character.

The Motion Picture Association has offered to help create videos and other instructional materials that could be used to teach basic values that are shared by all religions as well as secular philosophy. We ought to accept this offer.

With the explosion of the number of television channels, Americans now have an almost unlimited menu of specialized programming. There are fishing channels, shopping channels, home repair channels, old movie channels, science fiction channels, news channels, music channels, weather channels, and even channels devoted to the actions of Congress.

But there are no parenting channels. Arguably the information most important and precious to society cannot be found on TV. Parents desperate to understand how best to respond to the needs of their newborns, infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, adolescents and teenagers cannot find much help on the television. They should be able to. Congress should encourage the creation a parenting television channel.

Finally, Congress should encourage its own Members to get out the word about the tools that already exist to help parents. The GetNetWise site ([www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org)) contains a list of sites that are inappropriate for children. It also lists the various software programs that parents can use to block sites that they do not want their children to view. Members should link to this page from their official website.

Members should also help educate parents about the existing rating systems for video games and television. All of the industry associations have helpful booklets that explain how parents can use the V-Chip to help parents screen out programs with certain TV ratings. Members may also want to meet with various representatives of the entertainment industry to learn more about ratings systems and how to communicate that information to constituents. This information should be made available in Spanish and other languages.

NBC has begun airing a PSA campaign that focuses on the connection between youth violence and intolerance. Members may want to get a copy of the PSA to show at a town hall meeting. This campaign will also include an Internet site for parents to keep abreast of the issue.

Ultimately, parents are the front line in trying to protect our children from violent images. But Congress can play a role in encouraging our schools and communities to help educate parents about the resources that are available.

## VIII. HEALTH

The Mental Health Working Subgroup's objective is to determine the extent to which mental health problems have led to incidences of youth violence and to offer ways to address the problem. On October 27, 1999, the Mental Health Working Subgroup led a discussion within the full Working Group on the issue of mental health and youth violence. Distinguished guest speakers were William Pollack, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Center for Men at McLean Hospital and Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychology at Harvard University sponsored by Representatives Marge Roukema and Rob Portman, Walter Shervington, M.D., President of the National Medical Association and CEO of the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital sponsored by Representative Sheila Jackson-Lee, and John Reid, Ph.D., Executive Director and Research Scientist at the Oregon Social Learning Center in Eugene, Oregon sponsored by Representative Sander Levin.

### FINDINGS

Underlying depression and mental pain are at the heart of a significant percentage of violent acts committed by youth. Studies in Britain, that are now under way in the United States, demonstrate that bullies in the school yard have the highest depression rates in their grades.

Youth violence is not confined to violence among peers (gang violence, school shootings, etc.), but also occurs in the form of suicide. The rates of suicide have risen dramatically in recent years. Scientific research has shown that almost all people who kill themselves have a diagnosable mental or substance abuse disorder; and the majority has more than one disorder.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death during adolescence and the second leading cause in young adults. 29% of high achieving high school students have considered suicide. For adolescents aged 15 to 19 years of age, suicide rates have tripled in the years between 1960 and 1980. Each year, almost 5,000 young people, ages 15 to 24, commit suicide.

Suicide rates among young people of color have also risen in recent years. In the African American community, suicide rates have increased dramatically. Between 1980 and 1995, 3,030 black youths aged 10 to 19 committed suicide.

Society stigmatizes mental health problems. As such, significant cultural and ethnic barriers inhibit the widespread use of mental health services available to children and youth. The understanding of cultural/ethnic barriers and removing stigmatization is crucial to providing services.

Seven percent of children born on any given day will commit 70 percent of the violent crimes between ages 12 and 17. It is imperative that we recognize high risk factors and engage in early prevention. For example, pre-natal care is a significant factor in the health of the child,

and a mother who is healthy while she is pregnant will most likely have a physically and mentally healthy child.

There is a clear connection between substance abuse and school violence. Although youth may not be “high” when committing acts of violence, studies show that those who are engaged in harmful behavior, i.e. substance abuse, are more prone to future acts of violence than their peers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Drs. Pollack, Reid and Shervington made recommendations for preventing youth violence that are appropriate, pragmatic, scientifically based, and cost efficient.

- We must broaden our definition of youth violence. Youth violence should include emotional pain, loneliness, depression, suicide and the general disconnection from society that are the root causes of violence. Society must realize that emotional pain and these other factors do not recognize socioeconomic status, gender, or family life.
- Ensuring good physical and psychological health for expecting parents is the best way to deter harmful behavior in their children. This could mean having a public health care professional visit the expecting family to monitor pre-natal health care and teach parenting and childcare skills beyond infancy.
- The judiciary, the police, schools, families, and the communities must coordinate their delivery of services. Each entity should deliver the necessary services in order to provide comprehensive emotional support for children and youth. Existing model programs that coordinate among these agencies should be replicated in each State.
- The juvenile justice system should provide mental health screenings by qualified mental health professionals for each youth entering the system. According to a 1994 Department of Justice study, 73 percent of these juveniles reported mental health problems and 57 percent reported past treatment. Any youth found to have a mental health disorder must be provided care. Probation officials should oversee and coordinate with the youth's family the continuation of the youth's mental health services while on probation.
- Communities should work to remove the societal stigmatization of mental health problems. Parents and communities should publicize that troubled children and youth can be helped with effective mental health studies in the community and school.
- Students should be encouraged to participate in extra-curricular school activities. Studies have shown that a student in one after school activity is almost 50 times less likely to commit a violent crime.

- Early education, intervention, and prevention are key. We need to understand which children are classified as high risk and act early. Pre-natal and post-natal care is vital to the child's mental health.
- Parents need more educational programs to help them understand the problems today's youth face. Parents need to understand their children's reactions and learn how to communicate with their children daily. Parents need to learn to identify trouble signs of emotional pain. These educational programs should reflect the psychological differences between boys and girls.
- School systems should have professionals who are appropriately trained in mental health on staff. These professionals may include, but are not limited to, guidance counselors, school nurses, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. No better investment can be made for safe schools than pre-empting violence by recognizing and treating depression, teasing, discontent, and confusion before they erupt into harm. In addition, qualified personnel can inform teachers and administrators on recognizing the warning signs of a troubled child or youth.
- Student run groups must be created to work in cooperation with police, schools, parents, and communities to create support groups for students. Anti-violence and empowerment groups have been demonstrated to work.
- Families of a child that commits an initial violent act should have access to parenting classes. Parents need to realize that when a child commits a violent act he/she is acting from some sort of inner pain or turmoil and must seek to determine the cause and rectify the problem.
- Schools are the epicenter of a child's life. Children spend such a large portion of their time at schools so they should be a place where comprehensive emotional services are available. This does not mean that it is the school administration's responsibility to provide such comprehensive services, but rather they should be a coordinator for such services. If students are emotionally healthy, they will be able to achieve academically. It is in the schools' best interest to have the family support the student.

- By decreasing substance abuse among children and youth, we can reduce the likelihood of school violence. Effective prevention, intervention, education and treatment, particularly school-based and community-based approaches, are keys. A more effective Safe & Drug-Free Schools program should be an essential component of the long-term solution to youth violence concerns. Local anti-drug coalitions play a key role in mobilizing all sectors of a community to address the substance abuse problems that contribute to youth violence.
- Congress should strengthen the role of organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs that create mentoring relationships between adults and children.

## **CONCLUSION**

Early attention to prevention, intervention, education, and treatment of mental health problems in children and youth are the essential elements to reduce youth violence. Involvement by parents, teachers and the community at large is critical in recognizing risk factors and preventing those risk factors before it's too late. Communities should work to remove the stigmatization that is associated with mental health problems. The federal government should provide incentives to state and local governments to publicize available mental health services for children and youth. Congress should implement and make accessible comprehensive mental health services for all children and youth.

## APPENDIX B

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