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Top Stories - Pennsylvania

Juvenile offenders get shot to make amends

Quakertown, Richland panels provide youth with alternative to a criminal record.

The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)

By Riley Yates

April 12, 2008

http://www.mcall.com/news/local/all-b4_2yap.6356364apr12,0,7105365.story

Two Upper Bucks communities are becoming the latest to try to make it easier for youngsters in trouble to win a second chance.

Quakertown and Richland Township are establishing a youth aid panel, an all-volunteer board that allows people under 18 charged with minor crimes to avoid the court system and a possible criminal record that could haunt their future.

The panels, of which dozens have been formed in the region, offer a venue in which young offenders can take responsibility for their actions in exchange for community service projects, letters of apology, restitution or other punishments outside the regular judicial system.

"It keeps the justice local and gives the child a second chance," said Scott McElree, Quakertown's borough manager and police chief. "We were all kids once and sometime we don't make the best choices as kids."

Youth aid panels have a long pedigree in Bucks County, which was the second in the area to enact them, behind Delaware County. Warrington Township was the first community in Bucks in 1971.

In Upper Bucks, such places as Hilltown, Perkasio, Sellersville, Bedminster and West and East Rockhill have them. Municipalities in other parts of the Lehigh Valley region have also followed suit.

Before, there was no mechanism to punish juvenile offenders whose cases did not merit court proceedings, said Don Tangora, the former supervisor of Bucks County Juvenile Probation.

About 50 percent were more or less sent home with little or no monitoring afterward, said Tangora, who helped establish the youth aid program. The panels represented a chance to ensure justice was done, but not in a heavy-handed way, he said.

"Part of the success is in treating the kids in trouble fairly, giving them due process and a chance to tell their story," said Tangora, who is now in the private sector. "But they also are given consequences."

Hearings before the panel are voluntary and typically involve accusations of crimes such as underage drinking, shoplifting, vandalism and other property damage. Most involve first offenses

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only.

The program has proven successful, Tangora said. Statistics show recidivism is lower compared with other juvenile justice approaches for minor offenses, he said.

The panels are made up of citizens who must pass state police background checks in order to serve. Quakertown's members, for instance, are former borough Councilwoman Elfriede Werner, police department volunteer Richard Cobb and John Flynn, a former candidate for council.

On Monday night, Richland supervisors are slated to vote on the program. Quakertown councilors approved it in February.

"Everyone is saying this is what we ought to do because it works," said Jim Roberts, Quakertown Borough Council president. "We were told that this is something that's out there and proving successful."

More local girls lashing out with violent acts

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (PA)

By Karen Zapf

April 17, 2008

http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/southwest/s_562710.html

Katelyn Harkins recalls the event that changed her life for the worse: her father's drowning in 2004.

"When my father died, I got heavily involved in drugs," said Harkins, 19, of Bensalem in Bucks County.

Her downward spiral began with alcohol and progressed to marijuana, prescription drugs and heroin before she was arrested on charges of armed robbery.

Now in the home stretch of her treatment at an Adelphoi Village center in Blair County, Harkins represents a trend among young women. The number of girls younger than 18 arrested in violent crimes -- such as robbery, assault and arson -- has increased since 2002, according to state numbers and national statistics from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports.

According to the Pennsylvania Electronic Juvenile Justice Databook, there were 26,430 females younger than 18 arrested in the state during 2001. In 2006, the number rose to 29,693, an increase of more than 12 percent.

In Allegheny County, arrests of girls younger than 18 have been increasing since 2004, with 1,868 in that year and 1,949 in 2006 -- a 4 percent increase. More girls younger than 18 are being arrested in Washington County, with 174 in 2005 and 291 in 2006 -- a 67 percent increase.

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Some blame the trend on girls being encouraged to be aggressive in sports and academics -- like boys. Others say it is a combination of factors: zero-tolerance policies, as well as girls being victims or witnesses to abuse.

"In the old days, we didn't pay attention to girl fights," said Meda Chesney-Lind, professor of women's studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. "Now, they are being arrested."

In Erie earlier this month, two girls ages 10 and 11 were arrested after police said they dragged another young girl off the monkey bars at a school playground and stomped on her head and legs, breaking her hip.

Two Grove City girls have been charged with making terroristic threats for putting dozens of high school classmates and teachers on a "murder list," school district officials said.

Tammy L. Hughes, associate professor of school psychology at Duquesne University, said the typical female juvenile offender is 15, lives in an urban area and is in a single-parent family.

Chesney-Lind said girls are experiencing more violence either as victims or by witnessing a family member being victimized. She said this environment causes some girls to become violent.

"They are modeling male violence they have seen," Chesney-Lind said.

The number of females referred to juvenile court for prosecution in Allegheny County increased from 2006 to 2007. The two types of cases that "jump out" are aggravated assault and aggravated assault on a teacher, said Jim Rieland, the county's director of juvenile and adult probation.

In 2006, 85 cases of aggravated assault committed by female juveniles were referred to the probation department. That number rose to 109 in 2007, a 28 percent increase.

Cases of girls committing aggravated assault on a teacher rose from 64 in 2006 to 94 in 2007.

"Assaults and girl fights have gotten more serious," Rieland said.

In 1999, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency identified post-traumatic stress disorder as a significant health problem for girls in the state's juvenile justice system.

Westmoreland County is in its fourth year of a pilot program to address Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,

said Addie Beighley, the county's director of juvenile probation. Eighty-eight percent of girls in the county's juvenile justice system have the disorder as victims of sexual assault, rape, abuse or witnesses to violence.

"We assume all girls coming into the system have PTSD symptoms," Beighley said.

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Adelphoi Village, based in Latrobe, is a private, nonprofit child care agency that offers education and treatment to troubled boys and girls. In 1999, 73 percent of Adelphoi's clients were male, and 27 percent were female. In 2007, 63 percent were male, and 37 percent were female.

Mike McCalpin, executive vice president of Adelphoi Village, said the facility has a waiting list for girls.

"Females are getting involved in more serious offenses and aggressive behavior: assaults, car thefts and burglaries," McCalpin said. "The root cause is the trauma they have been through as young children."

Westmoreland is one bright spot. Statistics show the number of girls arrested there is decreasing. In 2004, 463 girls younger than 18 were arrested; the number fell to 365 in 2005 and 345 in 2006.

"We are doing a lot more education in our county to get the message out about girls experiencing trauma and how to treat them," Beighley said.

The goal is for girls -- with follow-up and support -- to go back home and not re-offend, Beighley said.

"We used to treat boys and girls the same and expected the same," Beighley said. "We shouldn't expect the same with girls. With girls, it's all about relationships. It has been an eye-opener."

Karen Zapf can be reached at kzapf@tribweb.com or 412-380-8522.

State prison no place for Lansdowne boy, 14, judge told

Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)

By Joelle Farrell

April 22, 2008

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20080422_State_prison_no_place_for_Lansdowne_boy__14__judge_told.html

A 14-year-old Lansdowne boy charged with murder for allegedly stabbing his older brother can be "salvaged" through the juvenile justice system, his lawyer argued yesterday.

It was the frequent beatings from his brother that drove Jahmir Ricks to stab him after an argument over a video game in July 2007, Ricks' attorney, Michael Malloy, said in court yesterday. Ricks needs help, but prison isn't the solution, he said.

"He was facing close to a battered-spouse syndrome," Malloy said during his closing arguments at Delaware County Court yesterday in a hearing to decide whether Ricks will stand trial as an adult. "This was not a one-time bullying here, it was a pattern of behavior."

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Ricks, who was 13 when he was arrested, has been in maximum security at the Delaware County Prison since he admitted stabbing his brother Antwan Ricks, 16. The brothers fought when Antwan refused to give Jahmir a turn with a video game.

Ricks is charged with first- and third- degree murder, aggravated assault, and related counts. If his case is transferred to juvenile court, he would be released by age 21 or sooner.

Prosecutors have argued that Ricks is too dangerous to be put in the juvenile system, where the average incarceration is between 10 and 14 months. Before his brother's murder, Ricks had already had several run-ins with the police: He had been caught with a knife at school, he extorted money from other students and helped break into a car, Deputy District Attorney Daniel McDevitt argued in a brief submitted to Delaware County Court.

A psychologist who examined Ricks for the commonwealth said Ricks needed an intensive rehabilitation program that would keep him locked away for as long as five years, McDevitt wrote. "The juvenile justice system does not provide an adequate facility which can address all of the defendant's needs," McDevitt wrote.

The State Correctional Institution at Pine Grove in Indiana County, Pa., offers a program for young adult offenders; at least two 14-year-olds have been in the program since 1996, McDevitt wrote. "Pine Grove offers the resources and programs needed to address the defendant's deep-seated behavior problems in a secure setting which would serve the public interest better than a short stint in a juvenile facility," McDevitt wrote.

Malloy said prison, regardless of the program offered, is no place for Ricks, an emotional boy struggling with his crime. "As nice as we would like to promote it to be like it's the Hilton of the state prison system, it is not," he said. "It is a state correctional facility."

Ricks broke down into tears when his mother took the stand. The judge postponed the hearing when Ricks became physically ill.

Yesterday was the sixth hearing in Delaware County Court to determine how Ricks should be prosecuted. Judge Frank Hazel will hear the prosecution's closing arguments tomorrow. Hazel then has 20 days to make his decision.

Contact staff writer Joelle Farrell at 610-627-0352 or jfarrell@phillynews.com.

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Juvie payments continue

County still paying over \$256,000 a month to PA Child Care

Times Leader (Wilkes Barre, PA)

By Jennifer Learn-Andes

April 23, 2008

http://www.timesleader.com/news/20080423_23juvie_jen_ART.html

Luzerne County is still paying \$256,513 per month to lease a Pittston Township juvenile detention center, even though commissioners voted to end the lease in February.

County solicitor Jim Blaum said Tuesday there's a delay in the required termination agreement between the county and PA Child Care LLC, which owns the building.

Commissioners are eager to sign a termination agreement, he said. However, PA Child Care representatives have indicated they won't sign off until they successfully negotiate juvenile lodging rates with the state Department of Public Welfare, Blaum said.

The state's challenge of the rates charged to lodge youth at the facility had prompted commissioners to vote to terminate the lease.

Welfare Department representatives said the state won't provide reimbursement at the current rates because PA Child Care is receiving too much profit from the lease. County officials say the resulting estimated \$2 million in lost funding per year would hamper their ability to cover the \$48 million, 20-year lease, which was approved by Commissioner Greg Skrepenak and former commissioner Todd Vonderheid in 2004.

PA Child Care owners Robert Powell and Gregory Zappala dispute the state's calculations and have been going back and forth with the state, county officials say.

PA Child Care spokesman Dan Fee said the company is keeping its promise to negotiate a termination -- something it was not obligated to do, Fee said.

"PA Child Care is willing to end the lease, but a series of things have to be taken care of," Fee said Tuesday. "It's not contentious. It's complicated."

Blaum said county officials have been advised that negotiations between the state and PA Child Care are "ongoing."

"Commissioners are ready, willing and able to sign a termination agreement. We had hoped it would've happened at the end of February," Blaum said.

Skrepenak, who has been heavily criticized for approving the lease, said Tuesday he does not understand why PA Child Care is linking the state negotiations to the contract termination. He said PA Child Care owes it to the county to end the lease because the lease amount was based on the company's insistence that the payment rates were locked in.

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Luzerne County has been charging \$302 per day for detention and \$335 for treatment, county officials say.

In addition to the lease, the county pays Mid-Atlantic Youth Services around \$318,000 per month to staff and run the 60-bed facility, which provides detention and treatment to juvenile offenders from Luzerne and other counties.

"I always felt that if the state came in and said the rates weren't OK, that the lease should be null and void," Skrepenak said.

Fee said Powell, an attorney, lives in Luzerne County and is committed to making sure the county gets the opportunity to reserve bed space.

"There is an outstanding demand for all the beds at this facility. They can fill them without the county, but then the Luzerne County kids would have to go somewhere else," Fee said.

County minority Commissioner Stephen A. Urban, who has always been critical of the lease, said he believes PA Child Care should immediately sign the termination agreement.

"PA Child Care is willing to end the lease, but a series of things have to be taken care of."

Jennifer Learn-Andes, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7333.

Top Stories - National

Clinton Crime Agenda Ignores Proven Methods for Reducing Crime Advocates say plan will increase incarceration rates and negatively impact the poor and minorities

For Immediate Release

April 14, 2008

Contact: LaWanda Johnson (202)-558-7974 x308, cell 202-320-1029

<http://www.justicepolicy.org/content.php?hmID=1817&smID=1571&ssmID=71>

Washington, D.C.--The Justice Policy Institute (JPI) announced today that Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's anti-crime package ignores critical research that finds that investments in employment, education, housing and treatment for those who need it is the most effective and fiscally-responsible way to improve public safety. Research shows that Clinton's proposal to revive former President Clinton's COPS initiative, which called for investments in policing, would increase prison populations, and may have a negative impact on the nation's poor and minorities, without significantly reducing crime. The Clinton Administration's "tough on crime" policies resulted in the largest increases in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history. Advocates say re-implementing this agenda would be a return to bad policies.

"The first COPS was found to be costly and ineffective in reducing crime rates and COPS 2.0 is not an improved version of the first one," says JPI executive director Sheila Bedi. "COPS was only successful in filling our prisons and jails with people who research shows can be better served with treatment, evidence-based practices, and community-based alternatives that also promote public safety."

According to research, adding police to the streets is not the most effective method for reducing crime. Delaware received \$19.6 million in COPS grants and during that same time, the number of violent crimes increased 35.9 percent. In contrast, Oklahoma City, which did not receive any COPS grants, decreased its police force by 16 percent and during that same period saw a dramatic 32.5 percent decrease in the number of violent crimes reported.

Furthermore, advocates say law enforcement professionals don't support policing as being the most effective method of reducing crime. In a 2002 poll, 71.1 percent of surveyed chief of police, sheriffs and prosecutors agreed that providing more educational and after-school programs would make the greatest impact in reducing youth crime and violence. Only 14.9 percent said that hiring more police would have the greatest impact.

"We've tried to win the war on gangs with law enforcement alone, but we have little to show for it," says National Black Police Association Executive Director Ronald Hampton. "Rather than engaging in endless battles, we need to target the problem behavior that hurts communities. We should support the kinds of prevention and proven programs that we already know reduce violence and crime."

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Research supports investments in communities as a more cost effective and beneficial way of reducing crime. Research shows that when there is a reduction in crimes rates, it coincides with increased employment. When more people have jobs, fewer crimes are committed. A study by the Heritage Foundation found that "For every 1 percent increase in civilian labor force participation, violent crime is expected to decrease by 8.8 incidents per 100,000" people.

"Not only does the Clinton crime plan lack innovation and forward thinking, it ignores all we know about crime prevention. When people are employed, violent crime decreases," says Lisa Kung, Director of the Southern Center for Human Rights. "One in every one hundred Americans is incarcerated. It is clear that Clinton intends to continue a legacy of policies that will keep Americans paying for more police, more prisons and more punitive measures."

Advocates also believe that Clinton's opposition to the U.S. Sentencing Commission's decision to make retroactive the changes to sentencing for the thousands of people who had received disproportionately long sentences for crack-cocaine, most of whom are African American, is concerning. Nationwide, from 1995 to 2004, drug abuse violations were the only crime that saw an increase in arrests following the COPS grant.

However, a report by JPI release last year, found that while African Americans and whites use and sell drugs at similar rates, African Americans are ten times more likely than whites to be imprisoned for drug offenses mainly due to disparate policing practices, disparate treatment before the courts, mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws, and differences in the availability of drug treatment for African Americans.

According to Families Against Mandatory Minimums, "it would be a cruel injustice to base the crack cocaine reduction on an assessment that these people have suffered under an unjust structure and then deny the benefit of the amendment to the very people whose experiences led the Commission to lower the sentences in the first place."

"If any of the candidates really wants to do something about crime, then they should invest in policies that increase employment, educational attainment and treatment for people who need it," says Bedi. "These are proven approaches that reduce crime and recidivism--evidence-based practices, which have undergone rigorous experimental inquiry, and have been shown to have proven public safety benefits."

For more information contact LaWanda Johnson at 202-558-7974, ext. 308.

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Court Won't Hear Young Killer's Appeal

Associated Press (SC)

By Meg Kinnard

April 14, 2008

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5g1ah7HoLXbu1xceS9ACNwuENmNLgD901SCK80>

Associated Press story picked up by several outlets across the country including: Forbes (NY), San Francisco Chronicle (CA), WFLX Fox 29 (FL), Bradenton Herald (FL), KPLC-TV (LA), KRIS-TV (TX), Herald Zeitung (TX), Fort Worth Star Telegram (TX), Bellingham Herald (WA), Morris Daily Herald (IL), MyFox Springfield (IL)

Story also received national coverage by Bloomberg.com, CNN, Reuters, New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday refused to review a 30-year prison sentence for a teen who was 12 when he killed his grandparents in their South Carolina home.

A juvenile justice advocate said Christopher Pittman, who turned 19 last week, was disappointed but stoic when she broke the news to him by telephone.

"You know he has hope, but he keeps it in his back pocket," said Janet Sisk, who visits Pittman every week and is director of the Charlotte, N.C.-based Juvenile Justice Foundation. "He knows this is not the end. He knows we're going to keep on fighting."

Pittman shot his grandparents Joe and Joy Pittman with a shotgun in 2001, then set fire to their home and drove off in their car. During his trial four years later, Pittman's attorneys unsuccessfully argued the slayings were influenced by the antidepressant Zoloft — a charge the maker of the drug vigorously denied.

The Supreme Court appeal dealt only with the length of Pittman's sentence. Attorneys with the University of Texas School of Law argued that his 30-year-sentence was too severe and wanted the justices to examine whether a long prison term for a child violates the Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

With no possibility of parole, Pittman will be 42 before he is released, his attorneys said.

Pittman's attorneys claimed he was the only inmate serving such a lengthy sentence for a crime committed at such a young age. The state pointed to recent examples of children as young as 13 receiving sentences of up to life in prison.

"Simply because the combination of factors justifying adult punishment for those so young ... does not happen often, does not mean that when it does the Eighth Amendment forbids a sentence that appropriately addresses society's need for retribution, incapacitation and deterrence," said state Attorney General Henry McMaster.

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ModelsforChange

Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice

Pittman's case drew wide attention, in part because of the link his lawyers tried to make between the crime and Zoloft, the most widely prescribed antidepressant in the United States. In 2004, the Food and Drug Administration ordered Zoloft and other antidepressants to carry "black box" warnings — the government's strongest warning short of a ban — about an increased risk of suicidal behavior in children.

During Pittman's appeal to the South Carolina Supreme Court, his attorneys argued that both his age and Zoloft influenced his actions.

The state Supreme Court turned down the appeal in June, saying Pittman's age belied the complexity of his crime. He planned a double murder, executed an escape plan and concocted a false story of what happened, the state high court said in upholding the punishment.

Defense attorney Andy Vickery said Monday there may be other appeals.

"It'll take us a little while to clear our heads, and then Chris will have to decide what he wants to do," Vickery said. "We're just shocked and saddened and disappointed that the Supreme Court didn't think this was a worthy case to hear."

Each year about 200,000 defendants under 18 are treated as adults, according to the National Center for Juvenile Justice. Many states automatically define young defendants as adults, due to their age or offense. Those numbers escalated in the 1990s as juvenile crime soared and legislators responded, with 48 states making it easier to transfer children into criminal court, according to the center.

Associated Press Writer Mark Sherman in Washington contributed to this report.

Juvenile Justice Foundation: <http://www.juvenilejusticefoundation.com>

Catholic Charities USA Takes Message of Hope to Capitol Hill; Hosts Hill Briefing Examining Strategies to Help Low-Income Youth

Business Wire

April 15, 2008

http://www.businesswire.com/portal/site/google/?ndmViewId=news_view&newsId=20080415005415&newsLang=en

Picked up by the Centre Daily Times (PA)

WASHINGTON--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Catholic Charities USA took its Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America to Capitol Hill today, hosting a briefing for members of Congress and their staff on the challenges facing low-income youth and their families. The briefing also presented innovative solutions for creating hope by reducing generational poverty.

"If we are to reduce poverty in America, we must develop creative public policy proposals, new initiatives, and a collective change of heart to prevent another generation of youth from growing up

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poor,” said Rev. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA. “That requires the collective will and wisdom of our leadership and all of us to address these issues and to propose effective solutions so that tomorrow’s generations will be included in the American dream—if you work hard you can provide a better life for yourself and your family.”

Along with the youth briefing, dozens of leaders of local Catholic Charities agencies from across the nation took this common message of hope directly to Congressional offices, asking their members of Congress to develop policies to help lift young Americans out of poverty.

At the briefing and in their Congressional office visits, Catholic Charities leaders called on Congress to develop comprehensive federal policies to better serve young Americans and reduce poverty in the areas of foster care, kinship care, and juvenile justice.

These recommendations include the following.

- **Foster Care.** Provide meaningful support to youth aging out of foster care such as access to transitional health care; employment and training opportunities; and proper financial education.
- **Juvenile Justice.** Support fair treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system by increasing resources to prevent juvenile crime and delinquency; emphasizing the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders and the prevention recidivism; and providing youth and young adult offenders exiting juvenile and criminal justice systems with pre-release and post-release services and education and training vouchers.
- **Kinship Care.** Address the needs of extended family members caring for children by improving access to federal resources for grandparents and other relatives caring for kin and providing more coordination and assistance in helping relatives access needed local services. Such supports include respite care, child care, housing assistance, support groups, and other vital services.

Catholic Charities USA’s Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America calls on policymakers and all Americans to cut the U.S. poverty rate in half by 2020. To learn more, visit www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Catholic Charities USA’s members—more than 1,700 local agencies and institutions nationwide—provide help and create hope for more than 7.8 million people a year regardless of religious, social, or economic backgrounds. For more than 275 years, local Catholic Charities agencies have been providing a myriad of vital services in their communities, ranging from day care and counseling to food and housing. For more information, visit www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

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Digest: Services for troubled youths and families

Baltimore Sun (MD)

April 16, 2008

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/annearundel/bal-ar.briefs16apr16,0,2461984.story>

Services for troubled youths and families

Anne Arundel County has launched a new initiative with the Center for Children to provide targeted clinical services to troubled and delinquent youths and their families.

The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services will sponsor and monitor the program through the Anne Arundel County Mental Health Agency.

Beginning in May, the Center for Children staff, working out of the Annapolis office of DJS, will work closely with at least 120 youth ages 11 to 18 and their families identified by DJS during the next year.

These families will receive Functional Family Therapy, a research-based model program that has demonstrated effectiveness at strengthening families and reducing recidivism of youth offenders.

Information: 410-222-7858.

D.C. Is Fourth in Nation in Incarcerating Residents, Report Says

Washington Post

By Robert E. Pierre

April 17, 2008

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/16/AR2008041601606_pf.html

The District has the fourth-highest incarceration rate in the nation, according to a report that says jails nationwide are bursting at the seams even though crime is nearly as low as it has been in 30 years.

The report by the Justice Policy Institute, a Washington-based group that focuses on what it considers an over-reliance on incarceration, said that people are more likely than ever to stay in city and county jails before trial. One reason is they can't afford bail. A significant portion of those in jail are homeless, addicted to drugs or mentally ill -- not hardened criminals, the report said.

Incarceration comes at a high cost. In 2004, local governments spent \$19 billion to fund jails, compared with \$8.7 billion on libraries and \$28 billion on higher education, the report said.

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In the District, 3,214 inmates are under city control at the D.C. jail and contract facilities. That is 553 people per 100,000 residents. Only Philadelphia and two Tennessee counties, Davidson and Shelby, lock up residents at a higher rate.

"The vast majority of people held in jail are not there for violent crimes," said Amanda Petteruti, a researcher and policy analyst with the Justice Policy Institute who co-wrote the report, "Jailing Communities: The Impact of Jail Expansion and Effective Public Safety Strategies."

"It's people who are homeless that are sleeping on streets, people arrested for drug crimes and graffiti," Petteruti said. "The money spent on jails could be directed to education, employment, housing and other social services that would improve public safety and make our communities better overall."

The numbers do not include people in state prisons on more serious charges or, in the case of the District, the nearly 7,000 inmates from the city being held in federal prisons. As part of a deal with Congress a decade ago, District prisoners are spread across 75 institutions in 33 states. Activists have been fighting for years to get Congress to pay more attention to what happens to those prisoners sent out of state.

A spotlight also has been shined on crowding at the D.C. jail.

In October, for example, a D.C. Superior Court judge threatened to hold Mayor Adrian M. Fenty (D) in contempt of court for refusing to adhere to a law requiring the city to set a limit on the number of inmates who can be held in the D.C. jail.

A week later, the District government agreed to cap the number of inmates at the jail at 2,164. The number had been pushed by the D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project, which sued to force the city to comply with a 2004 law aimed at improving conditions and operations at the District's main jail after two stabbing deaths and other inmate violence.

Under the agreement, the city will adhere to the population cap, except in "exigent circumstances," such as an unexpected mass arrest. Since becoming mayor, Fenty has visited the jail on several occasions to hear from inmates about how to improve conditions and ease the transition of inmates back into the community upon release.

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Judge to rule on progress in juvenile justice system

Impact of state's involvement to be assessed

InsideBayArea.com (CA)

From Staff Reports

April 22, 2008

http://www.insidebayarea.com/trivalleyherald/localnews/ci_9011835

OAKLAND — The California Youth Authority promised three years ago to overhaul the state's juvenile justice system to better rehabilitate the youths incarcerated within its detention centers.

Alameda County Superior Court Judge Jon Tigar will decide this week whether the state has made sufficient progress on those promises to provide a safe, therapeutic environment.

In 2004, the Prison Law Office sued the State Department of Corrections' Juvenile Justice division over a range of issues, including medical, educational and mental health care conditions at the state-run centers. A stipulation agreement signed in January 2005 outlined six areas the reforms would be focused on, and an implementation timeline for each. Special monitors were hired to oversee the reforms.

Sara Norman, a staff attorney with the Prison Law Office, said she pushed for the court hearing because too many deadlines have been missed and the youths are still at risk.

"Some institutions are so violent, the kids won't go to school. They're afraid and they won't leave their rooms, so they are not getting an education," Norman said.

The state has taken some steps — such as hiring more staff, doctors, psychologists and teachers — and made a few other changes that fall short of real reform, Norman said.

"(At the time) we filed the lawsuit, they would put the kids in restricted settings, lock up basically, where they are locked in for 23 hours and allowed out one hour a day," she said. "Now it's 21 hours in and three hours out. But that's not real reform, it doesn't rehabilitate anyone."

The case will be heard in Dept. 21, 1225 Fallon St., Oakland.

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Violence an all-too-real factor for some children

Medill Reports (IL)

By Chaya Harris

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<http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=87045>

The scene is intense. A man holds his 9mm to another's head and pulls the trigger. The body slumps hard to the sidewalk, blood everywhere, as the shooter runs away without remorse.

Sound like a movie, or maybe a bad dream? It's reality for some West and South Side kids.

With the increase of shootings and youth violence in many Chicago neighborhoods, many children playing outside are dealing with pressure and worry that goes far beyond making it across the monkey bars.

As of Wednesday night, at least 38 people had been shot and 15 killed since last Friday.

But these shootings aren't occurring late at night, in front of clubs or drug spots. Some are happening as kids walk to school and in broad daylight at neighborhood fast-food places.

"If you go into the neighborhood which has the highest homicide rate in Chicago, 75 percent of children have seen someone shot or stabbed," said Carl Bell, a psychologist and president of the Community Mental Health Council.

Erica White, 23, sits nervously watching her 9-year-old daughter, Paris, and 8-year-old niece, Maryella, play at a North Side playground.

"They have to keep looking over their shoulders every second," she said about the girls. White's uncle was recently shot in the arm and leg. A month ago, her sister was shot. She has become so scared of her West Side neighborhood that she brings Paris to the North Side to attend school at Swift Elementary.

"Innocent bystanders get hurt all the time," she said. "Of course I'm worried."

Paris, who is in third grade, said, "I feel really uncomfortable walking around. Sometimes I'm scared."

The pain of losing a loved one usually eases over time, but the apprehension gripping some people in these poorer communities could have lasting effects.

For several years, doctors have been saying that exposure to violence at young ages has a strong possibility of creating mental health problems, such as attention deficit disorder, depression, and post traumatic stress syndrome.

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Many believe that it caused them to perform poorly academically and withdraw from social interactions.

And perhaps the most startling belief of all was that kids who witness violence are prone to becoming violent.

Bell, who has done extensive research on youth and violence since the 1980s and still counsels children at his South side facility, was asked about how the recent shootings would affect mental health.

“In terms of the direct effects, it depends,” Bell said. “A risk factor, like being exposed to violence, is not automatically predictive of the outcome.” He studied 40 risk factors, or indicative behaviors, that affect whether or not a child will exhibit violence.

Bell also pointed to a Department of Child and Family Services study that said 25 percent of children who experienced trauma showed effects of the trauma.

Although Mina Bahonjic’s son did not experience any trauma that she is aware of, she did notice a change in her 9-year-old son’s behavior in recent years.

“He was scared of any young people standing around outside and never wanted to go and play,” she said. As he grew, he started understanding the news they watched every morning and to listen to what people in their community were saying.

According to Jeanne Beckman, a developmental psychologist who has researched the effects of media violence, traumas often confuse kids.

“They can’t distinguish between what they see and what they’re told happened,” she said. “I can’t imagine what it’s like for children and families exposed to those kinds of things.”

She said traumatic acts can sometimes lead to post traumatic stress, which includes a heightened state of anxiety, mood swings and, sometimes, recurring flashbacks.

Bahonjic confirms this: “For a while, my son thought everybody was in a gang and gangs were everywhere.” Her son would get very tense and nervous anytime he heard loud voices. Once she moved from Pratt and Clark to a home off of Broadway, closer to downtown, he became easy-going and made friends playing outside.

Although it has long been thought that most children who experience violence become violent, Bell said that is not true. Exposure to violence is fairly low in terms of risk factors, and children who have protective factors will deal with violence exposure better.

“It’s not the trauma, it’s the feeling of helplessness that causes a child to act violently,” Bell said. “A child needs to have a good social fabric, self esteem, sense of power, social skills, and someone then can talk to and connect with.” Therefore, a child with a loving family or good friends at school - protective factors - is very likely to have a nominal reaction to witnessing a violent act.

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Ron Rufo, a crime prevention speaker and juvenile crime specialist, said that many juveniles who commit violent crimes are first-time offenders. He also said that many of the younger children charged with crimes do not progress to more serious crimes, even though they may face intimidation from older gang members.

So like White and her girls, Rufo and Bell wonder why these kids are shooting each other.

“I believe youth violence is increasing, but I don’t know why,” Rufo said. “Kids are more angry today and there’s more pressure on them to do better ... Some of these kids that you talk say that ‘Hey, if it’s my time to die, it’s my time to die.’ There’s no fear of death.”

One 19 year-old who hangs out in Uptown, whose name is Twan, backed up Rufo’s belief.

“Violence does not affect me at all,” he said. “It doesn’t matter.”

When asked about his friends who could be involved in gangs, he said that he only worries about himself. When further asked about his little brothers and sisters facing potential violence, he said, “I don’t really think about it because there’s nothing we can do.”

Feelings of hopelessness and not caring about the future are prevalent among high school students, and even more so among minorities.

According to a 2008 National Profile of the Mental Health of Adolescents, black and Hispanic high school students reported feelings of hopelessness and despair that prevented them from daily activities more than their white peers.

The group that issued the report, the National Adolescent Health information Center, also said that, in 2005, 14.9 percent of Hispanic high school girls attempted suicide compared to 9.3 percent of white girls.

Many of these emotional and social problems arise because children don’t usually understand their actions, Bell said. He explained the different stages of brain growth, and said that the part of the brain responsible for judgment and understanding the concept of death does not fully develop until about 23.

However, Rufo said, “A 9-year-old knows what’s right and what’s wrong, or if your actions warrant something in return. I really don’t think they feel they’re ever going to get caught.”

Imposing harsher penalties and placing juveniles in adult correctional facilities is one approach to preventing youth crime, but Bell’s research demonstrated that it actually has the opposite effect.

A report issued by the surgeon general’s office in 2001 said youths who are transferred to adult criminal court have significantly higher rates of committing repeat offenses and a greater likelihood of committing subsequent felonies than do youths who remain in the juvenile justice system.

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They are also more likely to be victimized, both physically and sexually.

"Stricter laws are not going help," White said. "When they lock people up, they throw them in there and treat them like animals. They need to turn jails into a rehabilitation center with educational and support programs."

Even though there may some differing opinions, many Chicagoans agree that there needs to be more parental and community involvement. Bell has statistical data proving the importance of support systems for healthy mental development.

Rufo said the problem lies with everyone in the community, so everyone must be involved in creating a solution. "Teachers are key, parents are a big factor and people need to work with police," he said.

"More people need to take responsibility for their children. We also need to get guns off the street. Now, if you want to buy a gun, you can buy them like cigarettes."

Youth prisons 'still broken'

State progress has been slow, expert testifies

Stockton Record (CA)

By Scott Smith

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http://www.recordnet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080425/A_NEWS/804250327/-1/A_NEWS06

OAKLAND - With few exceptions, California's youth prisons, including one near Stockton, remain broken, a nationally recognized specialist in juvenile justice testified Thursday in Alameda County Superior Court.

"I think there have been some improvements," said Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. "I would agree the system is still broken."

Krisberg testified for the Prison Law Office, which seeks to put reforms of the state's Division of Juvenile Justice under a court-ordered receiver. If granted, the receiver would take over control of ongoing efforts to reform the youth prison system.

The hearings come three years after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2004 visited the N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility near Stockton to settle a lawsuit filed by the Prison Law Office, alleging inhuman and illegal conditions in the state's youth prisons. The settlement launched massive reform efforts.

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Prison Law Office attorneys Donald Specter and Sara Norman are asking Superior Court Judge Jon S. Tigar to order the receiver, a move state correctional officials believe is not necessary because the system is starting to turn around.

Krisberg testified that violence continues to run high, and youth lockups like Chad operate on an adult prison mentality, which is not a sign of a shift from a penal system to one that rehabilitates troubled youths.

On a recent visit to Chad, Krisberg said he talked to wards who wore shackles and orange jumpsuits imprinted with the words "CDCR Prisoner." At Chino's Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility, staffers on a crisis intervention team have been fitted with anti-stab vests.

At many youth prisons, staffers continue to carry pepper spray, and they wear prison guard uniforms, something one wouldn't see in similar, more advanced youth lockups in Missouri, Georgia and Arizona, he said.

California's recidivism rate for juvenile offenders remains at 75 percent or 80 percent - the highest in the nation, Krisberg said. Wards aren't prepared to leave when their time is up, he said.

"Would you say the environment is conducive to the goal of rehabilitation?" Specter asked.

"Not currently, no," Krisberg responded.

Citing some progress, Krisberg said wards aren't housed in living units labeled with their gang denomination as they were three years ago. This former practice forced wards to join gangs if they weren't already affiliated with one, he said.

And wards are now housed in small groups with a higher number of staffers around them, which Krisberg said is a sign of progress.

Bernard Warner, chief of the state's Division of Juvenile Justice, said outside the courtroom that he feels progress is coming and a receiver is not necessary.

Warner said his experts, who testified earlier in the week, show different results, and they explained to Tigar the complex nature of undergoing massive reform.

According to his statistics, the violence at six of eight youth prisons is lower than the national average. The Division of Juvenile Justice has trained nearly 700 staffers on motivational approaches, making it the largest training effort in the nation, Warner said.

"It takes time and money to reform a system," Warner said, arguing that there is no need for a court-ordered receiver. "We never said it would be fixed in two years."

Tigar, who said he has visited several California youth prisons, asked attorneys to suggest some books on juvenile justice to inform his decision. Attorneys expect the hearings to continue intermittently through May.