



HOUSE REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE

REP.
ROBERT
BRACKENRIDGE,
CHAIR

TASK FORCE REPORT ON YOUTH VIOLENCE

FORWARD

"Let us put our heads together and see what life we will make for our children."

Sitting Bull - Lakota

The House Republican Policy Committee Task Force on Youth Violence was established in 1993. The goal of the task force was to study the causes of violence in schools and communities, evaluate programs which seek to prevent violent behavior and prepare recommendations.

Task force members began by touring various detention centers operated by the Michigan Department of Social Services. These included Camp Nakomis, Maxey Training School, Shawono Center, Adrian Training School and Green Oak Center. During these visits they had the opportunity to interview several juvenile offenders participating in the various programs.

More than 250 individuals attended public hearings that convened in Traverse City, Onaway, Holland, Napoleon, Saginaw, Davison Township, Milan, Waterford, and Detroit. Participants included department directors, parents, police

officers, judges, teachers, community leaders, individuals from public agencies, and students. Testimony was recorded and extensive research was conducted.

This report is intended to be a basis for ongoing work and, particularly, policy development and recommendations. Rather than be viewed as the definitive document on the issue of youth violence, it should be seen as a point of reference for the development of a long-term strategy for the reduction and prevention of youth violence.

TOP SCHOOL PROBLEMS AS REPORTED BY TEACHERS

CBS News, 2/2/87

1940s

Talking out of turn
Gum chewing
Making noise
Running in halls
Cutting in line
Dress code violations
Littering

1980s

Drug abuse
Alcohol abuse
Pregnancy
Suicide
Rape
Robbery
Assault

INTRODUCTION

YOUTH VIOLENCE, AN AMERICAN EPIDEMIC?

"Youth today have more dangerous drugs in their bodies, more deadly weapons in their hands and are being socialized into a culture having a far more casual attitude toward violence."

James Allan Fox and Glenn Price,
Criminologists

THE PROBLEM

Public fear of crime is at an all-time high. Crime once again has captured the distinction of being one of the top concerns of Michigan citizens. Violent crime is on the increase and youthful offenders are the fastest growing segment in our judicial system. Victims and assailants today are younger and disputes are more trivial.

While there is a concern about violence in general, the focus of this report is youth violence, that is, acts of violence committed by persons up through the age of 16. At age 17 a person is considered, for criminal justice purposes, to be an adult. There is no single solution to the problem and the causes of youth violence are still subject to debate.

Despite decades of research on youth violence, few causal links have been documented. There is no exclusive theory of youth violence. The causes are complex and associated with many risk factors. Youth violence is often described as being of many types with many causes.

While youthful arrest rates continue to increase, violent acts against young people are also on the rise. Violent crimes are causing children to become casualties. Statistics reviewed by the task force indicate that the number of murdered Michigan teens has increased by more than 120 percent in less than 10 years. Violent behavior has become so common today that we and expect it. Our youth are exposed daily to violence through television, radio, newspapers, cartoons, war-like video games, toys and heavy metal rap music. Children lack experience and critical judgment to distinguish this type of material as a fabrication.

The fastest growing segment of the criminal population is our nation's children. Juveniles arrested are not only the disadvantaged, minority, inner-city youth, but reflect all races, social classes and life styles. The migration of families from the inner cities has now moved the youth violence problem into the suburbs and rural areas. Juvenile crime has become an issue facing every community in Michigan today.

Despite these trends, it should be noted that most delinquent youth do not commit violent acts and are involved with the juvenile justice system to a very limited extent. Although the rates and number of offenders are increasing significantly, the majority of today's youth act in a socially responsible manner. Too often we fail to recognize them or the positive works being done by our young people, and instead focus upon the negative social behaviors of that age group.

THE CAUSES

Violence is a learned behavior. The basic values, attitudes, and interpersonal skills acquired early in life are likely to be pivotal in developing predispositions for violent behavior later in life. In order to reverse the trend toward violence in this country we must break the chain of events that leads to violent behavior. Most would agree that factors contributing to youth violence are complex with roots centered in social and economic conditions.

A family's economic status is one of the most powerful factors affecting the family and the setting where children live, including the housing, neighborhoods, schools and social opportunities. Adolescents growing up in families experiencing economic hardship are at high risk for health and behavioral problems, school failure and for becoming involved in criminal activities. They also lack the sources of security, stability, personal resilience and empowerment that lead to good self-esteem.

Being born out-of-wedlock complicates life from the beginning. Children born to adolescent mothers in general suffer academically, emotionally and economically. Children born to teenage mothers are more likely themselves to have children during adolescence. Their dropout rate from school is higher and school performance lower. They are sexually active earlier than their peers. They are more likely to encounter trouble with school discipline, run away from home, have more problems with drugs and alcohol, and inflict injury on others.

According to recent research, abused children have a 40 percent greater chance of engaging in future delinquency or adult criminal behavior. Women abused as children are 77 percent more likely to become involved in criminal behavior. The average abused youth is first arrested at 16.5 years of age, one year earlier than a non-abused youth.

There is also a direct correlation between youthful offenders and drug or alcohol abuse. Not only does alcohol escalate aggression and lower the inhibition to act out, those drinking are also more likely to become victims of violent acts and to engage in unprotected sex. There is strong evidence that aggressive behavior can be caused by acute drug intoxication as well as alcoholism.

Probably the greatest single contributor to the increase in youth violence is the breakdown of the family unit. Children today are growing up in weakened, chaotic and often broken families. Many family structures and parental behaviors result in a lack of positive role models for children to emulate, even in two-parent families. Children lacking role models are more susceptible to influences promoting or validating the use of violence. Also, without a strong family children may opt to join gangs to become part of a group. Affiliation with such groups often encourages delinquent or violent activity.

Children today have more freedom and are exposed to a wide variety of stimuli in a culture which seems to promote violence and sex. More often we find young people virtually raising themselves, strangers in their own neighborhoods. There is strong evidence that combined with the disintegration of the family unit, we are also experiencing a breakdown in the community structure. Neighbors no longer know or feel responsible for one another.

Today's weakened family and neighborhood structure reflect a forgotten value of human life and less accountability for one's actions and responsibility to others. Our culture is too much one of instant gratification and has created a generation prone to boredom. Combine this with a feeling of hopelessness and despair for children living in poverty, and it is no wonder we have what many call a "lost generation."

JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The juvenile justice system in America evolved through a series of reforms originating in the 1880s. The child-saving movement was not so much a break with the past as an affirmation of faith in traditional institutions. Parental authority, education at home and the virtues of rural life were emphasized because they were in decline during that era.

The concept of "parens patriae" underlies the juvenile justice system, and juvenile courts attempt to balance protecting society and rehabilitating juveniles' delinquent behavior patterns. Emphasis is placed on keeping juveniles away from the potentially harmful influences of the adult correctional system and providing rehabilitative treatment as a parent-like function. Because the emphasis of the juvenile justice system is rehabilitative, the system has often been criticized for not employing stronger sanctions against juveniles who commit serious crimes of violence. Today, juvenile residential centers which were originally instituted to deal primarily with delinquency offenders are filled with perpetrators of major violent crimes.

While early efforts with juvenile offenders focused on control and rehabilitation, more recent efforts focus on prevention. There is greater emphasis placed on early identification of those "at risk" in order to clarify the physical and social environments that lead to delinquency, and there is great emphasis on prevention of repeat crime.

Michigan offers a broad array of programs and treatment opportunities for juvenile offenders, utilizing training schools, foster and group homes, residential centers and community-based and day treatment approaches. While many of these programs are worthwhile, evaluation is necessary to determine their effectiveness. We must allow for the modification and expansion of programs that work. More importantly, we must require the termination of those strategies that do not perform adequately so that our limited resources can be used in the most cost-effective manner.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Because the problem of youth violence is so complex, a three-pronged approach needs to be considered in addressing the issue:

- 1) **primary prevention, precautions to prevent youths from developing negative or violent behaviors,**
- 2) **secondary prevention, to deal with status offenders and youngsters in early delinquent stages, and**
- 3) **tertiary prevention, for those already in the juvenile justice system.**

This approach is patterned after the public health model, because task force members concur that youth violence is, indeed, a public health problem, one that will quickly reach epidemic proportions if it is not curtailed. The most cost effective prevention is that taken at the earliest primary stage — dollars spent at the front end will reduce dollars needed at the back end in years to come.

During the public hearings it became apparent that there are already a number of excellent programs in place dealing with violent youth. Also, it was repeatedly stated that better communication and coordination between various programs at the federal, state, regional and local levels is needed. Since each community is unique, creativity in program development is crucial.

There is an old African saying that "it takes a whole village to raise a child." We would be wise to adhere to this philosophy. It is time for communities to again make children the top priority. Delinquent youth need to know that negative behavior will not be tolerated and that illegal actions will be met with sanctions and penalties. A coordinated effort between law enforcement, juvenile justice, social agencies, schools, businesses, service organizations, churches, and families in each community can reverse the trend and break the cycle of violence in

this state. Each citizen must make a concerted effort to join with his/her neighbor to "reclaim" their neighborhood and community and make it a safe and welcoming place for residents.

Intervention programs need to be focused in settings where it is easy to reach youth: schools, churches, playgrounds, child care settings, youth activity sites, recreational centers, social service facilities and juvenile justice facilities. Rather than having the children come to the program, the programs need to go to the children.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS PRIMARY PREVENTION

"Instead of putting money into high cost prison beds, we should put money into prevention. We need to put money into kids."

Elizabeth Arnovitz, Executive Director
Michigan Council on Crime & Delinquency

To be most successful, intervention needs to begin early, when children are first learning to deal with conflict. Children adopt values from individuals who surround them. Often their first teachers are parents and caregivers. The foundation for good discipline should begin in the home where parents guide children toward acceptable behavior and transmit values. The major emphasis in primary prevention should be to support and supplement initiatives that promote family values — the greatest single force that shapes behavior.

Task force members believe that prevention should be the primary focus even though it will take considerable resources and energy. The vast array of problems surrounding youth violence will not go away, and it will be more costly to deal with them later.

Communities and schools should adopt proactive strategies to eliminate inappropriate behavior

patterns and create an atmosphere conducive to development of positive behavioral and social skills.

COMMUNITY

1. ENCOURAGE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING TO ORGANIZE NEIGHBORHOOD COALITION PROGRAMS.

If we are to protect the safety of our children and turn the tide of youth violence, we must do it in our communities, in small groups of caring people where each child's name is known and individuality is respected. Communities need not wait for their children to be in daily peril to begin to recreate an atmosphere of order and safety. They should be encouraged to establish an environment where violence will not be accepted and responsibility for one's actions and respect for each other are the norms. Doing nothing should no longer be a choice.

We should encourage cooperative efforts by community colleges and universities who have the experience and could provide the technical assistance needed to initiate such efforts. Continued efforts might provide the faculty an opportunity for research and make available internships and/or class credit for students for community service in child care programs, mentorships, community policing and rehabilitation projects.

2. ENCOURAGE SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL BUSINESSES TO DEVELOP AND/OR EXPAND MENTORING PROGRAMS.

Children are not shaped by programs or policies, but by people and values. It takes loving and talented teachers, caring parents and mentors who help give children the moral compasses they need to succeed as adults. Community-based programs

are resources that can be used in fostering healthy youth development. Service organizations with members who are dedicated to helping others are a natural source to serve as mentors to "at risk" youngsters.

Traditionally, community service programs serve adolescents from economically advantaged families. In the future, efforts should be made to expand the scope to reach less fortunate children and expose them to positive experiences and goal-oriented programs. Community activists should be encouraged to become the role models absent in so many lives by including "at risk" youngsters in their regular programs. Also, the establishment of mentoring programs for "at risk" children would be beneficial.

3. SUPPORT THE CONTINUATION OF TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS.

According to the Alan Guttenacher Institute, 3,000 teenagers in the United States become pregnant each day. These future moms, who are children themselves, are often ill-prepared financially or emotionally to deal with the responsibility of a baby. They are often unaware that a baby demands time, effort and responsibility.

If we are going to make an impact, teen pregnancy programs must be offered through a wide spectrum of existing organizations such as churches, social service agencies, and youth and community organizations. A consistent, repetitive message must be sent to these teens.

4. ENCOURAGE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PARENTING PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT GROUPS.

The art of parenting is not inborn; it is a learned process. Many teen parents come from dysfunctional families without positive role models in regard to child rearing. Parenting programs are inexpensive to operate and can be organized through churches, child care centers, social service agencies community organizations, and businesses.

Support groups provide interaction with others experiencing similar situations who can offer helpful suggestions. We must continue to move forward and meet the changing needs of our young people.

5. ENCOURAGE PROGRAMS WHICH FOSTER RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD.

Young males must be made to realize that they, too, have a responsibility for the children they father. Society often fails to recognize fatherhood as a worthy state. In fact, many programs are designed in such a way that discourages male participation in the family structure. Many walk-away fathers were abandoned by their own fathers early in life and see this as acceptable behavior. Often divorced fathers see their children only as a financial burden and fail to provide valuable time, companionship, and guidance to their child.

Given the opportunity, most men welcome the chance to be a part of their children's lives, but many don't know how. There are a growing number of programs which provide support and guidance to young men and arrange for mentors for those who have not had a male role model in their own lives. These mentors can guide them in assuming responsibility for their child. Task force members support these efforts and believe that these valuable programs should continue.

6. ENCOURAGE BUSINESSES TO USE PRE-TAX CHILD CARE BENEFIT PACKAGES.

Research states that the number of working mothers in this country tripled between 1950 and 1981. A majority of children today are being raised by strangers in daycare centers. Also, mothers are leaving babies in these centers at earlier ages. Appropriate daycare can be expensive, and high costs often force parents to place children into centers that are not desirable. Parents concerned about the well-being of their children will not be able to direct 100 percent of their efforts to their job, so it behooves employers to maximize

opportunities for their employees to place children in quality programs.

By using pre-tax dollars, employees can afford better facilities. Also, businesses would realize a cost savings as they would not be required to make Social Security contributions on this benefit. Task force members support efforts by the House Republican Policy Committee Task Force on Child Care in addressing this issue.

**7. COMMEND THE MEDIA FOR
RECOGNIZING POSITIVE
ACHIEVEMENTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.**

It is heartwarming to read about positive attributes by our young people. Readers enjoy learning about reports of social, scholastic and athletic achievements instead of crime and violence.

Task force members commend the media for their efforts but believe they should look beyond the positive accomplishments of scholastic or athletic excellence by acknowledging achievements of "at risk" students as well.

SCHOOLS

**8. SUPPORT CONTINUATION AND
EXPANSION OF THE DARE
PROGRAM AND ENCOURAGE THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF A PILOT
PROJECT WHICH WOULD EXPAND
THE PROGRAM TO INCLUDE
CONFLICT RESOLUTION.**

Young people today are experimenting with drugs and using alcohol at earlier ages than ever before, some before the age of 14. There is a direct correlation between the use of alcohol and/or drugs and the commission of violent crimes by juveniles.

Repeatedly, testimony citing positive results from the DARE Program was received. Task force members believe that it is imperative that these and similar programs continue to send a message to young people relative to the dangers involved with

alcohol/drug use. Consideration should be given to expanding programs that include multiple exposures as children need constant reinforcement to learn and maintain positive behavior patterns.

Conflict resolution should be included as programs continue to change and expand. Children who learn to resolve conflict in positive ways are able to avoid potentially dangerous situations, develop maturity and better self-esteem. Because the present curriculum for the DARE Program does not include this aspect, task force members suggest that a pilot project be developed which incorporates this type of concept.

**9. EXPAND EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROGRAMS.**

Children learn behaviors from adults and their environment surrounding them. Often "at risk" children are exposed to primarily negative behaviors during the most formative years of their lives.

Early childhood programs can have a positive impact upon future behaviors. Unfortunately, few young children are exposed to them. By enabling schools to use part of their "at risk" funding to provide early childhood programs, more of these vulnerable children will be reached at a time when it will have the most impact.

Programs need to be incorporated that expose children to positive behaviors. Ideally, such programs would include parental involvement and could be expanded to include parental training or support groups.

**10. ENCOURAGE EFFORTS TO
ESTABLISH POSITIVE ACTIVITIES
FOR CHILDREN AFTER SCHOOL.**

Today more children are raising themselves and are alone most of the time. Without positive activities to occupy their time, youngsters tend to gravitate to negative groups and develop delinquent behavior patterns. Young people need supervised places to frequent which offer productive activities. Activities can be sponsored by schools, churches,

businesses, PTA groups, and/or civic organizations and can include a wide variety of programs ranging from recreational activities to tutoring programs and job skills training. The options are endless and can be tailored to meet the needs of individual communities.

II. ENCOURAGE SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT TEAMS TO CONSIDER A COMMUNITY SERVICE COMPONENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

Young people today often have no sense of community pride and adults feel no sense of responsibility for their community's children. Without a sense of community pride, youngsters are more likely to participate in acts of vandalism and commit violent crimes against area residents. Task force members were told by various teens that they feel pride and a sense of accomplishment when they help care for the elderly/disabled, feed the homeless or improve neighborhood housing and streets.

A community service component could be designed to provide young people with interaction within their community and be flexible enough to allow students to meet the requirement through individual activities. It should be completed outside of the normal school day and could serve as a supplement to the standard school curriculum.

12. CONSIDER EXPANDING SCHOOL PROGRAMS TO INCLUDE LIFE SKILLS/EXPERIENTIAL COMPONENT PROGRAMS.

Youths who are considered "at risk" of committing violent crimes tend to have low self-esteem and lack competency in basic living skills due to the absence of positive adult role models. There is evidence that programs which include life skills training and experiential activities not only increase the competency in basic daily living skills, but also increase one's self-esteem and pride in accomplishment. Expanded school programs such as alternative education approaches, charter schools, after-school or weekend programs

encompass these components and could play a vital role in altering negative behavior patterns before they become criminal.

13. ENCOURAGE CONTINUATION AND/OR EXPANSION OF LIAISON PROGRAMS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN SCHOOLS.

Schools using liaison officers report that there is not only a reduction in violent behavior within the schools but also quicker intervention into possibly dangerous activities. School liaison officers develop allegiances with students and often become role models. Liaison officers are willing to listen to students and take time to learn about their concerns. Often this might be the only personal interaction some children have with an adult. Liaison officers can be used to provide gun safety programs, instruct in the negative consequences of substance abuse, provide safety through monitoring of halls and channeling gang energy into positive organized activities.

14. ENCOURAGE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STUDENT JURIES TO DEVELOP SCHOOL CODES OF CONDUCT.

Children need to know the acceptable parameters of behavior, and schools need to send the message that negative actions will not be tolerated. Rules of conduct must be easily understood and developed by the students themselves, with adult assistance. Student juries should set penalties for infractions of the adopted rules and policies and should encourage positive discipline programs that foster self-esteem, academic success and parental involvement. These programs could also incorporate peer mediation and conflict resolution components. School curriculums which instill a respect for law and citizenship would reinforce such programs.

SECONDARY PREVENTION

"The writing is on the wall: Unless young criminals are deterred early, they very likely will graduate to adult crime."

Flint Journal

The primary emphasis of secondary prevention should be to identify, educate and redirect children who are "at risk" or those with a propensity toward violence. A coordinated effort between family, school, law enforcement, social services and other agencies using a variety of programs and interventions should be tailored to meet the individual needs of each youngster.

15. ENCOURAGE RESTITUTION PROGRAMS, MONETARY OR SERVICE, AS PART OF PENALTY SYSTEMS.

Unfortunately, violent youth often show no remorse for their actions. The punishment for minor offenses is often inadequate. Many times, families do not have the financial means to make restitution and even when they do, having parents pay the bill teaches nothing. Community service as a means of restitution, or as part of the penalty, provides "at risk" youth valuable opportunities to interact with their community and develop a sense of belonging and contributing. This type of penalty system will allow "at risk" youth to start appreciating their own worth and importance which is necessary if they are to be accountable for their behavior and act responsibly toward others.

16. ENCOURAGE EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A UNIFORM INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM FOR SCHOOLS AND DEVELOPMENT OF HABITUAL OFFENDER FILES THROUGH A COORDINATED INTERAGENCY EFFORT.

When a youth commits a violent act it is often preceded by progressively negative behavior patterns. If known in advance, the result could have been predicted and, with proper intervention,

that violence prevented. However, because of strict confidentiality requirements as well as lax reporting, there is no organized structure for reporting minor incidents. Various agencies tend to deal with each incident internally. Task force members believe that prevention should be taken seriously by establishing a reporting system through which various agencies can enter, transmit and review data. Truancy is the best predictor of future violent behavior. Coordinated reporting and interagency access could lead to appropriate early interventions to alter negative behavior patterns.

17. ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY-WIDE SUPPORT FOR WRAP-AROUND SERVICES FOR DELINQUENT YOUTH.

The goals of wrap-around services are fourfold:

- 1) prevent the need for removing a child from the family,
- 2) prevent the need for a higher level of care,
- 3) reduce the necessary level of care for a child,
- 4) maintain a family-care situation for a child who has experienced multiple placements.

The wrap-around service is developed and/or approved by a child and family team, is community-based and unconditional. It delivers coordinated, highly individualized services in three or more basic need areas of a child and family. This service is directed at "high risk" youth who are in imminent danger of being placed in restricted residential or institution placement. While not every child will be "cured" through this model, the approach does provide better, more sustained, individually-tailored and locally based services for the child and family. The task force supports continuation and expansion of the wrap-around model.

18. ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COORDINATED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES WITH ALL AGENCIES CONCERNED AND REQUIRE PARENTS/GUARDIANS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TREATMENT OF DELINQUENT OFFENDERS.

Frequently, "at risk" youth receive a variety of services from different agencies. Sometimes these services are duplicated or inconsistent. A coordinated interagency program which incorporates family support systems and a treatment plan tailored to an individual youth is the most efficient and effective means of dealing with delinquent youth. Programs should include such components as mentoring, tutoring, experiential training, life, and job skills training. Also, training in non-violent social skills and conflict resolution for both the "at risk" youth and the family should be included.

19. EXPAND THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE DISCIPLINE SCHOOLS TO KEEP TROUBLED YOUTH IN SCHOOL AND OFF THE STREETS.

Suspending or expelling troublesome youth from our schools, while providing no educational alternative, makes little sense. It is important to remove violent students from the traditional classroom setting so as not to create disturbances for other students. However, barring disruptive students from an education virtually condemns them to a life of crime. According to recent statistics, 75 percent of our jail population has no high school diploma.

Putting these youngsters on the streets makes them more vulnerable to gang involvement and threatens the safety of our citizens. Troubled youth should be required to attend alternative education programs with more task-oriented, individualized training or highly-structured, supervised in-school suspension programs.

To encourage schools to use these types of alternatives, the per pupil base grant should follow the student into these alternative discipline schools.

20. SUPPORT LEGISLATION TO ESTABLISH PILOT PROJECTS FOR RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES FOR UNMARRIED TEEN MOTHERS.

Many babies are born today to unmarried teen mothers who often live in poverty and have poor parenting skills and weak support systems. Because of this, alternative living arrangements should be established for these young mothers.

Often, teen moms come from families that lack positive parenting role models. Although young moms need adult support, forcing them to remain within their own homes can often pose a safety threat from abusive males. Alternative living arrangements within foster homes or residential facilities are needed. Unfortunately, such facilities are scarce. Some residential facilities that house teen moms are privately operated by individuals, churches or organizations. They provide adult supervision and on-site child care staffed by mothers themselves. Centralized food preparation provides training in nutrition and other life skills. Training in other areas such as parenting and job skills could also be offered.

While such facilities need to be subsidized, it is felt that this is a more effective method rather than providing each mother an individual check with no support system. Support checks should be submitted directly to the facility, not to the minor parent.

21. ENCOURAGE BUSINESSES TO ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS TO OFFER JOB PLACEMENT FOR "AT RISK" YOUTH.

It takes the involvement of an entire community to change negative behavior patterns. Children living on the edge see nothing beyond the horizon. Youth feeling despair cannot focus on the education and training necessary to make them productive in society. Job placement within the community provides youth with a sense of community and ownership, training in job skills and a feeling of accomplishment and self-esteem. Such placement provides them with a means to earn money

legitimately. Placement requirements could require "at risk" youth to take a "pledge of good citizenship" and failure to comply could result in job loss or other sanctions.

TERTIARY PREVENTION JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

"Studies show repeatedly that punishment reduces both frequency and seriousness of offenses by young criminals and is most effective when it is consistently imposed for every offense."

Sarnoff Mednick,
psychologist

Any juvenile justice system must balance between protecting society from violence and assisting youth in eliminating criminal behavior. In treating youthful offenders, a variety of programs should be provided to meet the individual treatment needs of the offender. Programs should be multi-phased and provide job, life, and social skill training. Consideration should be given to include a community service component and family support programs where appropriate. Procedures should provide a team approach using all participating public agencies in coordinating efforts and recommending individual and family treatment plans. Programs should be expanded to include rehabilitation provisions for young offenders and include mental health services where appropriate. All programs should include an intensive follow-up or after-care component.

Consequences for criminal activity need to be sure and swift so juveniles will know they are accountable for their actions. According to law enforcement officials, the juvenile justice system is a revolving door where teens learn they will not be punished for a crime. The system must be flexible enough to allow a variety of sanctions tailored to promote responsibility particularly with the non-

violent offender. It should include community service as a viable component either separately or in conjunction with other penalties. For repeat offenses, there should be a system of progressive discipline with tougher penalties for subsequent delinquency. Young people must be taught that they are responsible for their actions, that the community will not tolerate negative behaviors, and that choosing to participate in such behaviors will have negative consequences for them.

22. SUPPORT EFFORTS TO DEVELOP YOUTH EDUCATION ALTERNATIVES.

Task force members believe that youthful offenders expelled from school should be entitled to an education up to the age of 18. The state should assure the availability of alternative education and funding should follow the youth to the entity providing services. Training programs should become accredited and the Department of Education should participate in program funding.

23. RECOMMEND THAT THE QUALIFYING AGE FOR ADULT COURT JURISDICTION BE LOWERED FROM 15 TO 14 YEARS.

Newspaper headlines repeatedly recount the horror stories of teens committing serious offenses such as murder, rape, robbery and violent assault. Statistics show that juveniles accounted for 17 percent of all violent crime arrests in 1991. Juvenile arrests for murder increased 67 percent between 1987 and 1991. Younger offenders are committing serious violent felonies. This segment of the juvenile population lacks moral structure. Thus, lowering the wavier age from 15 to 14 will get more of the serious, violent youth off the streets. They should not be able to continue their victimization of others and should be held accountable for their adult actions with adult sanctions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

24. SUPPORT MANDATORY DETENTION TIME FOR POSSESSION OF A FIREARM IN THE COMMISSION OF A CRIME BY A YOUTH.

Recent studies indicate that obtaining a handgun is no problem for millions of American children. It is a reflection of what is going on in our society at large. People are using weapons as a means of expressing their frustrations. A focus on the safety of our children is needed. If a juvenile uses a gun in the commission of a crime, there should be a mandatory detention in an effort to deter youth using weapons as a status symbol or a form of dispute resolution.

25. INCLUDE IN THE "AUTOMATIC WAIVER" PROVISION, CRIMES COMMITTED WITH A DEADLY WEAPON.

The current "automatic waiver" provision includes serious violent felonies such as murder, criminal sexual conduct and armed robbery. However, there are other crimes (B & E, felony assault, kidnapping, car jacking) which, when committed with the use of a deadly weapon, make them just as serious and just as violent as the current list of offenses. Including these crimes will send a clear message that using guns and other deadly weapons is not the way to handle disputes, and those who choose to use these weapons will be held accountable.

26. ENCOURAGE THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TO CONSIDER PROVIDING ADDITIONAL ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS FOR LESS VIOLENT OFFENDERS.

While swift and sure incarceration is required for the serious violent youth, those committing non-violent, less violent, and property offenses should have more options than just residential placement. Innovative programs, such as wrap-around services, should target "high risk" youth who are at imminent risk of being placed in restrictive residential or other institutional placement.

27. REQUIRE THE DELINQUENT TO PROVE REHABILITATION AT AGE 19.

In an effort to demonstrate to juveniles that they are accountable for their actions, it is recommended that the burden of proof be placed on a juvenile offender to establish that he/she is rehabilitated and no longer a risk to public safety prior to release from residential placement. As with adults facing a parole hearing, juveniles should be required to show that they understand the nature of their criminal actions and are ready to live a life free from crime. They should be required to explain to the court how they intend to live outside the institution and whether or not they have a job or are enrolled in school. However, if they are unable to prove rehabilitation the juvenile would be required to stay in the system until their 21st birthday.

28. ENCOURAGE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO COMMENCE A FEASIBILITY STUDY ON INSTITUTING A VIOLENT OFFENDER PROGRAM.

In order for violent offenders of violent crimes to take the criminal justice system seriously, we must create sanctions which are immediate and serious. Currently, in all but the most serious offenses, a juvenile can only be detained until their 19th birthday. Given the violent and often habitual nature of the offenses juveniles are committing it no longer makes sense to treat them the same.

The proposed advisory group's task would be to investigate a new sentencing scheme for the violent and habitual young offender, ages 14-16. This program should emphasize rehabilitation by providing job and life skills training as currently exists within the juvenile system. However, upon reaching the age of 21, if rehabilitation had not been satisfactorily demonstrated, the individual could be moved into a correctional facility for adults. Sentences in this system would be longer and would reflect the seriousness of the offense and the offender. No earned time or good time credit would be applied to reduce these sentences. A mandatory supervision period would be imposed after release,

similar to intensive supervision parole in the adult corrections system. Under this proposed system, the responsibility would be on the youth to change his/her behavior with support from the state or face further, more severe sanctions.

CONCLUSION

"The juvenile system isn't prepared to deal with violent youth, and the adult system isn't prepared to deal with youth."

Honorable Bruce A. Newman
Genessee County Probate Court

Juvenile violence cannot be viewed in isolation. It is often the most immediate manifestation of other problems — child abuse, domestic abuse, lack of health care for children, dysfunctional families, poverty, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, drugs, guns and shortage of good jobs to name a few.

We must ask ourselves how a child can be born into this world and by a very young age be capable of killing another human being. What possibly could have gone so terribly wrong so quickly?

The evidence leads to the conclusion that many separate factors are involved. Individuals are born into wretched circumstances, lead lives that are brutal, lack hope for the future, and all too often have their lives cut short by the violence around them.

If we do nothing more than concentrate on today's juvenile offenders and disruptive students we guarantee that society will continue to deal with others like them in the future.

Because of this, programs that prevent juvenile violence must be supported, and to do this we must establish a guiding philosophy on just what we want to accomplish.

Traditionally, government's response to these problems has been reactive. The result is that the time there is a response, the problem has become so serious that government does not have the resources to address it. These findings call for a fundamental re-examination of the manner in which government addresses youth violence.

Task force members believe that a more holistic approach to the needs of the family are warranted and that services must be better integrated in their delivery. Government must join with communities, schools, and parents in planning and providing for the kinds of support to ensure that our children can live and grow without the threat of violence. Current programs need to be effectively evaluated. We should support only those that show promise and include interventions aimed at reducing risk factors and strengthening families and children.

Michigan must make fundamental changes to correct the shortfall in our current service delivery system. A new system must be primarily preventive in its approach with more emphasis on what happens at the "front end." The system needs to be adaptable, flexible, and sensitive to cultural, gender and racial concerns.

There are distinct roles for governments and communities. Ultimately, a successful answer to juvenile violence means changes in families and individuals. Communities and governments must work together to help those families and individuals in need of outside assistance.

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