

Nation's law enforcement leaders issue new plan to prevent youth violence

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - In the wake of the beating murder of a 16-year-old Chicago honor student Derrion Albert and growing national concern about youth violence, America's law enforcement leaders are calling upon the nation's elected leaders to get serious about preventing youth violence. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, an anti-crime organization led by 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors, released a new plan detailing the best-proven approaches for reducing youth violence.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca, Minneapolis Police Chief Tim Dolan, and Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes, along with U.S. Rep. Danny Davis (IL-7), held a conference call today at 11 a.m. (EDT) with reporters to express their support for evidence-based solutions as a way to prevent such violent crimes.

The plan details effective interventions for at-risk kids that cut crime, prevent violence and save taxpayer dollars, including 1) high quality early education for at-risk kids from birth to age five, 2) voluntary parent coaching through home visits for at-risk new parents, 3) effective after-school programs, and 4) proven interventions to turn around troubled and delinquent kids.

"It's a lot easier to teach a boy than to mend a man," said Sheriff Baca, Chair of the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Board of Directors. "If we make sure children have a solid foundation from birth to age five, we can reduce the likelihood that they'll be doing twenty to life later on."

High-quality early education programs help at-risk children succeed in school and avoid delinquency and criminal activity. A long-term study of a high-quality preschool in Michigan found that by age 27, at-risk children who did not participate were five times more likely to be chronic offenders compared to similar children who did participate.

Voluntary parent-coaching programs prevent child abuse and neglect and reduce later criminal behavior. Survivors of child abuse and neglect are nearly 30 percent more likely to be arrested for violent crimes as adults, compared to children who grow up free from abuse and neglect. Quality home-visiting programs send trained professionals to help at-risk parents learn about child health and safety and avoid abuse and neglect. A study of the Nurse-Family Partnership home-visiting program found that it cut child abuse and neglect in half among at-risk families who participated and reduced later arrests of children by 60 percent.

Between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m. on school days, juvenile crime soars. High quality after-school programs teach kids skills and values while cutting crime. A study of Boys & Girls clubs showed that housing projects without the clubs had 50 percent more vandalism and 37 percent worse drug activity than projects with the clubs.

"After the school bell rings, it's the prime time for juvenile crime. We need safe and constructive places for school-age kids to go, so they aren't making decisions that could land them in a squad car or behind bars," Chief Dolan said.

Enrolling troubled teens and their parents in research-based programs can curb delinquent behavior and prevent repeat arrests. For example, the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) model provides youth offenders and their families with access to mental health services instead of

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placement in the juvenile justice system. A study of FFT found that it cuts repeat arrests among juveniles in half.

“There isn’t a silver-bullet to prevent every violent act, but these programs are based on the best research and focused on the most at-risk kids. Not only will investing now in what works save a lot of lives, like Derrion’s, but it will save a lot of taxpayer dollars,” D.A. Hynes said.

“A parent living through the violent death of a child is absolutely tragic. If some good can come of this, it’s that we take immediate action to build safer communities for the future,” said Miriam Rollin, Chief Operating Officer of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. “The research overwhelmingly shows that reaching the most at-risk kids must be part of our plan for preventing future tragedies.”

The law enforcement leaders and crime survivors of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids are calling on all federal, state and local officials to implement this four-part plan to cut crime and violence by investing in proven programs serving at-risk children and youth. Congress has opportunities in the coming months to take real steps forward to reduce youth crime, including through early learning legislation, home visiting provisions in health reform, “No Child Left Behind Act” expansion of after-school availability, and strengthening of federal delinquency programs.