

FACT SHEET: Ganging Up on Crime

April 11th, 2005

JPI FACT SHEET

Ganging Up on Crime?

Putting Gang/Crime Statistics in Context

“Gangs have declared war on our nation. They are ravaging our communities like cancer—urban, rural, rich and poor – and they are metastasizing from one community to the next as they grow”—Congressman J. Randy Forbes, Fourth District of Virginia (April 5, 2005)

---In the state of Virginia between 2003 and 1993 violent crime dropped by 25% declining from 24,160 to 18,115[i].

“One-third of individuals under the age of 18 are now members of gangs, according to the Department of Justice.” --*Bush Declares War on Rising Youth Gang Violence* (April 7, 2005), Brandee J. Tecson, MTV.Com

---If this were correct then 24,211,474[ii] youth aged 18 and younger would be in gangs, a figure not substantiated by crime data or what we know about gang crime.

Crime, and Cuts in Context: Some neighborhoods in the United States continue to experience unacceptable rates of violent crime. While Congressional sponsors caution “gangs are an ever-present and growing problem,” the leading indicators of crime in the United States show that the historic crime drop witnessed in the 1990s continues in most parts of the country. Both adult crime and youth crime fell throughout 2003, and mid-year 2004 — the latest years of consistent and available data from the justice department. But while most gang experts call for an appropriate social service response to youth development and neighborhoods in distress, this administration and Congress support huge cuts to programs that serve youth. These cuts and punitive provisions in the HR. 1279 *The Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act* are likely to do more to destabilize communities and aggravate crime than promote public safety.

The leading national indicators suggest that crime is far from growing or surging.

Serious adult crime has fallen. The latest crime survey from the FBI’s Uniform Crime reporting program examines the first six months of 2004. Compared to the first six months of 2003, violent crime fell 2% in 2004, and the number of homicides fell by 5.7%. The drop in violent crime and homicides over the one-year period was the biggest drop recorded since 2001, which came after the historic drop in crime of the 1990s.[iii] Violent crime, adult and juvenile, fell by 28% from 1993 to 2003; 1,926,017 and 1,381,259 respectively.[iv] Homicides declined at similar rate of 33% from 1993 to 2003; 24,536 and 16,503 respectively. [v] In recent years from 2001 to 2003, during the so-called surge in gang violence, youth homicides declined by 3%

Serious youth crime has fallen. The latest crime survey from the FBI’s Uniform Crime reporting program breaks down the age of people arrested for serious offenses in 2003. The number of people under 18 arrested for homicide declined 30%. Between 1993-2003, youth homicide arrests declined by 75%.[vi] Youth violent crime fell by 46% from 1993 to 2003.[vii]

Serious Gang Crime in Context: While many communities do experience unacceptable levels of serious crime, including gang crime, our measures of serious gang violence do not tell us that the problem is “ravaging” all our communities. In 2002, gang homicides represented 7% of the known circumstances in which homicides occurred. Four times as many homicide victims were killed in relation to an “argument” than a gang.[viii]

“It is easy to underestimate the grip that gangs have on some of our cities. But the sad reality is that their grip on urban life is lethal.”

—United States Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald, Northern District of Illinois-Chicago Area (April 5, 2005)

Serious crime has fallen in most cities. Even in cities where law enforcement says there are “super-gangs,” the latest federal surveys show crime on the decline. Compared to the first six months in 2003[ix], the number of homicide arrests fell by 25% in Chicago in 2004, robbery arrests fell by 7%, and property crime fell by 4%.

This administration proposes cuts to programs that serve young people and communities in distress.

Juvenile prevention programs, such as the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG), will be zeroed out in this administration’s budget.

Child and Family Services, which include Head Start and services for Abused and Neglected Children, will be cut by 3.3 billion dollars in the next four years under President Bush’s budget.[x]

Elementary and Secondary education will be cut by upwards of 11 billion dollars in the four years.[xi]

Vocational and Adult education will be cut by 5.8 billion in the next four years.[xii]

FACT: Imprisoning more young people as adults, increases crime.

HR 1279 proposes to change the federal juvenile justice system to authorize prosecution of 16 and 17 year old gang members who commit violent crimes. Research[xiii] conclusively shows that prosecuting young people as adults does not reduce youth crime. Research shows that young people prosecuted as adults, in comparison to youth held in juvenile facilities, are more likely to:

commit a greater number of crimes upon release

commit violent crimes upon release

commit crimes sooner upon release.

FACT: Punitive rhetoric distracts from real problems.

· Inciting fears and promising to crack down on mythical threats does not serve the public. Gangs are a symptom of social distress and HR 1279 is ill equipped to address the underpinnings of crime in a productive manner.

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[i] Uniform crime Report, 2003; 1999 <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cuis>

[ii] United States Census Bureau General Demographic Characteristics:2003

[iii] Preliminary figures comparing the first six months of 2004 to the first six months of 2003, from the Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation (<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>)

[iv] Uniform Crime Reports, 2003, <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>

[v] Uniform Crime Reports, 2003, <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>

[vi] Uniform Crime Reports, 2003; 2002, <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>

[vii] Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Arrest Rates by Offense, Sex, and Race (1980-2003).

[viii] Supplemental Homicide Reports, by Circumstances, <http://www.ojp.gov/bjs/homicide/tables/circumsttab.htm>

[ix] Preliminary figures comparing the first six months of 2004 to the first six months of 2003, from the Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation (<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm#cius>)

[x] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Where would the cuts be made under President's Budget? State Data (February 22, 2005)

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[xiii] Research by Donna Bishop of Northeastern University and Jeff Fagan of Columbia University concerning the impact of trying and incarcerating young people in adult facilities on re-offending summarized in 'The Florida Experiment: An Analysis of the Impact of Granting Prosecutors Discretion to try Juveniles as Adults,' www.justicepolicy.org