

Issues in Brief



DC Action for Children

July 2006

Summer 2006 Crime Wave -- An Advocacy Opportunity

INTRODUCTION

Much has been made recently of the crime wave affecting the District of Columbia -- for good reason. Crime and its victims are up; the police department reports an 18% increase in robberies and increased youth participation in criminal activities. The good news is that Police Chief Charles Ramsey has been making clear the link between poverty and crime and has called on the government to do more to reduce poverty and therefore crime. All sides want the city to spend more money -- either on police and cameras or prevention and social services. At least as the problem relates to young people, the "right" solution is somewhere in between.

This issue brief will highlight the facts about poverty and share some proactive and effective advocacy strategies that can effect change.

FACTS

We are pleased that Chief Ramsey has repeatedly mentioned the drivers of crime. From our perspective, too little attention has been paid to the facts about poverty and social services in the District:

- The number of concentrated poverty census tracts doubled between 1990 and 2000, disproportionately in Wards 7 and 8
- One in three children and youth in the District live in poverty
- Of the estimated 8,960 children and youth with a mental illness in the District of Columbia, only 5% will receive treatment in FY 2006
- Only about one-third of early care and education programs are of high quality

- The majority of out-of-school time services are located in the "center city" even though a large proportion of young people live east of the Anacostia River
- Not all schools have school nurses despite the legal requirement, preventing many youth from accessing health care
- The city will spend about \$2.2 billion on children and youth in FY 2007

TAKING THIS ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITY

A number of organizations, already active in the advocacy arena, have proactively used the crime emergency to support an agenda for children and youth, including:

- DC Action for Children -- Commenting twice on crime emergency legislation, specifically, offering specific recommendations and policy and budget actions that support children and youth. The comments were consistent with our advocacy and policy work on the city's effective youth development strategy and budget.
- Pre-k for All DC campaign -- Garnering support for full funding of the city's pre-k system in FY 2008.
- DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy -- Highlighting the links between teen pregnancy, poverty and crime.

Using the crime emergency as a platform, there is much we can do to move an agenda for children. Emotions soar when we discuss youth crime and violence because the stakes are high. Children's lives are hanging in the balance. It is easy to merely

vent and wring our hands. However, we owe it to our children to harness our emotions to not only identify the problems but to come up with solutions and strategies. Ways that individuals and organizations can ensure that the government does right by children and youth include

- Developing a proactive policy agenda for the rest of this Council Period (through December 31, 2006)
- Planning for Day 91 of the crime emergency (the emergency legislation lasts 90 days)
- Monitoring the implementation of the FY 2007 budget
- Having a plan in place to work with the city's new leadership before they take office in 2007
- Engaging actively in the FY 2008 budget process
- Working together to ensure that policy and practice inform decision makers
- Monitoring the implementation of the city's youth development strategy and offering specific solutions

Allocations to children and youth as illustrated in the FY 2007 Children's Budget Report

- \$140 million for school readiness
- \$1.3 billion for school success
- \$367 million for healthy behaviors
- \$62 million for youth engagement
- \$253 million for stable and supportive families
- \$110 million for successful transition to adulthood

The *Children's Budget Report* is available by e-mail from scambria@dckids.org.

THE CRIME EMERGENCY IS YOUR CHANCE TO BE AN ADVOCATE

Those who are interested in advocating now and in the future are encouraged to join us in our **5 Promises to Kids Campaign**. Information is available on-line at <http://www.dckids.org/getinvolved/promise1.php>. Read the promises and sign on to our campaign to encourage the District's leadership to make children and youth a priority. We are always looking for new partners in our work to protect and nurture young people.

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DC Action for Children is an independent, non-profit multi-issue children's advocacy organization dedicated to improving conditions for children, youth and their families in the District of Columbia.

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