



DC Action for Children

Memorandum

TO: Members, Council of the District of Columbia

FROM: Susie Cambria, MSW, Deputy Director/Public Policy

DATE: July 19, 2006

RE: Vote on emergency crime legislation

Thank you for holding the briefing yesterday on the mayor's proposed emergency crime plan. It was instructive and we were pleased to hear the Council's support of youth programs directed at diverting youth crime and violence along with the body's willingness to be proactive, promoting positive youth development.

We, like you, have thoughts about the proposal and the responses from the government officials. I hope that you will consider our "take" on the crime plan in advance of the special session today at 1:00 pm.

First, we appreciate the widespread support of the youth strategy expressed at the July 18 briefing. The initiatives supported by Mayor Williams are ones that youth development and youth crime experts believe are and will be effective. You know from our past work with the Special Committee on the Prevention of Youth Violent Crime that we support the concept and components of the strategy. As to the question about how quickly the efforts can be rolled out, the majority is on-going and can be expanded fairly quickly.

Second, we understand the support for the curfew change but think that this will do little good. As we said in our letter yesterday, we question whether those young people who exhibit negative, questionable, or delinquent behavior will heed the new curfew hours, whether parents will enforce the new curfew—currently they are not—and whether police officers will enforce the curfew given the many time-sensitive issues confronting them such as backed-up calls for service and the like. **We take to heart the comments made by Councilmember Barry about the**

roles and responsibilities of parents and suggest that we institute aggressive and intensive parenting supports for fragile families. This cannot be done by summer's end but should be part of the Council's agenda for the remainder of CP 16.

Third, we are concerned about the current youth employment rhetoric. We are not opposed to youth employment – what we support is the creation of a youth employment program that focuses on job readiness, employer training and support and that is focused on the long-term job needs of the young people. There is widespread research on this issue and we believe that employing a “best practices” model will yield the best results for all concerned.

Fourth, we are not sure that community-based organizations have the capacity to immediately expand in a quality way. Certainly, many non-profits offer worthwhile programming to children and youth across the city. But we also know that there is no consistency in staffing levels, staff training, group size and program quality across these programs. We continue to assert that the city's young residents need access, yes, but need access to quality programs that keep them safe and that meet their myriad needs.

Fifth, a significant gap in the mayor's proposal is mental health services for young people engaged in or victims of crime. There are a number of intensive, specialized and personalized models that are currently being used that demonstrate benefits for the parties involved. Adding some small part of the \$1.5 million originally in the contingency fund for FY 2007 would go a long way in reducing the effects of violence and future violence right now.

Sixth, there is some question about the utility of adding funding for staff and programs in recreation centers with expanded hours. Certainly, centers without staff and programs are useless. We are concerned that the Department of Parks and Recreation cannot hire appropriate and trained staff immediately. We are also concerned that the youth who will use the facilities are not those who will be committing crimes. And while we certainly believe in keeping children and youth safe, we also want resources marshaled in the most effective and proven ways.

Finally, we hope that concern for the city's residents, particularly the young ones, continues when the legislative session reconvenes in the fall and that the Council is prepared to move legislation that will ensure that the needs of young people are met as a rule and not as an exception. DC Action for Children is prepared to offer specific legislative recommendations and we are available this summer to jump start the process. Feel free to contact me at scambria@dckids.org or 234-9404 for more information.