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Preventing Crime and Violence

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Written Testimony of Chief Michael Miller

Ridgeley Police Department
Ridgeley, WV

On Behalf of
FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. My name is Michael Miller and I am the Chief Michael Miller of Ridgeley Police Department in West Virginia. I am also a member of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, an anti-crime group of nearly 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and victims of violence from across the country who have come together to take a hard-nosed look at the research about what really works to keep kids from becoming criminals.

As a Sheriff, I know there is no substitute for tough law enforcement. Across the United States, law enforcement is busy arresting, prosecuting, and holding in custody offending juveniles. The most dangerous of these youths are locked up. Research shows, however, that punishment alone will often not be enough. The good news is that for juveniles who come before the court for their first offense, six out of ten will not return to juvenile court again. But for the second-time juvenile offenders who are age 14 or younger, 77 percent will come back for a third court appearance.

These recidivism rates indicate that America is failing its young people and endangering its communities. Fortunately, research—and our experiences—show that targeted investments, that help keep kids away from crime and that intervene effectively to redirect offending juveniles onto a different path, can make our communities safer.

Title V and Title II of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, Juvenile Mentoring, and the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) provide needed support for these evidence-based prevention and intervention approaches to reduce recidivism. The recently enacted Second Chance Act can provide additional support for some of these approaches.

Keeping Kids Away from Crime

The Title V Local Delinquency Prevention Grants program is the only federal funding source dedicated solely to the prevention of youth crime and violence. Almost 1,500 communities have received Title V grants since 1994 through a competitive grant process that requires states and localities to match at least 50% of the grant with cash or in-kind contributions. To participate in the program, localities must engage in collaborative, comprehensive planning regarding needed community-based delinquency prevention efforts. The grants can be used to fund a wide range of prevention programs, including after-school activities, mentoring, and tutoring, as well as drop-out, gang, and substance abuse prevention.

After-school programs funded by Title V help at-risk youth avoid criminal activity in the first place. In the hour after the school bell rings, violent juvenile crime soars and the prime time for juvenile crime begins. The peak hours for such crime are from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. These are also the hours when children are most likely to become victims of crime, be in an automobile accident, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs. After-school programs that connect children to caring adults and provide constructive activities during these critical hours are among our most powerful tools for preventing crime. For example, a study compared five housing projects without Boys & Girls

Clubs to five receiving new clubs. At the beginning, drug activity and vandalism were the same. But by the time the study ended, the projects without the programs had 50 percent more vandalism and scored 37 percent worse on drug activity.

Juvenile Mentoring, like after-school, has also been shown to cut crime. A study of Big Brothers Big Sisters found that young people who were randomly assigned to a Big Brother or Big Sister mentor were about half as likely to begin illegal drug use and nearly one third less likely to hit someone compared to those who were assigned to a waiting list.

Despite the proven benefits of after-school and quality mentoring programs, inadequate funding for these critical investments leaves millions of children at needless risk of becoming delinquent teens and adult criminals. For example, more than 14 million children still lack constructive adult supervision after school.

Reducing Recidivism through Effective Interventions

Several interventions for young offenders that incorporate community sanctions have also been shown to reliably cut crime. One such program is the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program. FFT works to engage and motivate youth and their families to change behaviors that often result in criminal activity. In one evaluation, families with troubled youths were randomly assigned to either a group that received FFT or one that did not. The youths whose families received FFT were half as likely to be re-arrested as the youth whose families did not receive the family therapy. By reducing recidivism among juvenile offenders, FFT saves the public an average of \$32,000 per youth treated.

The Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) program targets kids who are serious juvenile offenders by addressing the multiple factors – in peer, school, neighborhood and family environments – known to be related to delinquency. One MST study followed juvenile offenders until they were, on average, 29-years-old. Individuals who had *not* received MST were 62 percent more likely to have been arrested for an offense, and more than twice as likely to be arrested for a violent offense. It is also less expensive than other mental health and juvenile justice services like residential treatment and incarceration, saving the public \$4.27 for every dollar invested.

Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) or JJDP Title II state formula grant funds have been used to support these efforts, but funding levels have declined since 2002 and the unmet need is substantial.

Reducing Recidivism through Effective Reentry Approaches

The transition of juvenile offenders from confinement to “life on the outside” presents great risks and opportunities for young people and society. Each year, approximately 100,000 juveniles leave correction facilities. Unfortunately, many young people are released without access to critical services, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will return to crime. Juveniles released from confinement still have their likely “prime crime years” ahead of them. Perpetrators over age 17 commit 85% of all violent crimes and young adults aged 18 to 21 account for a greater percentage of crime than any other four-year age group. Unsuccessful transitions into the community result

in an alarmingly high recidivism rate for juvenile offenders of 55-75%. Fortunately, the likelihood that young people will successfully transition back into society after confinement improves markedly with comprehensive, research-based reentry efforts. Comprehensive reentry programs are especially effective among young people. With their brain development still in progress—especially the part of their brain that performs “executive functions” like decision-making—young ex-offenders are more amenable to effective behavior modification interventions, thus saving lives, anguish, and public tax dollars.

Effective offender reentry efforts include programs like Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC). MTFC provides specially trained foster parents and ongoing supervision by a program case manager, as well as frequent contact and coordination of services with a youth’s parole or probation officer, teachers, work supervisors and other involved adults during and after a youth’s out of home placement. Compared to similar juveniles placed in non-secure group facilities, the MTFC approach cuts the average number of repeat arrests for seriously delinquent juveniles in half, and six times as many of the boys in MTFC as boys in a group home were not arrested again. MTFC is also cost-effective: it saves the public an average of over \$77,000 for every juvenile treated.

The bipartisan Second Chance Act can support effective reentry efforts, including programs like Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care. The Second Chance Act authorizes assistance to states and localities to develop and implement strategic plans for comprehensive efforts to enable ex-offenders to successfully reenter their communities such as: family reunification, job training, education, housing, and substance abuse and mental health services. The bill would also provide for research on reentry, as well as create a national resource center to collect and disseminate information on best practices in offender reentry. We all want safer communities and the Second Chance Act can be a step toward reducing the high recidivism rate among juvenile and adult offenders.

Needed Investments

When we know what works to prevent kids from committing crime in the first place and how to steer them away from crime once they have committed an offense, it seems silly that we don’t fully utilize these approaches. But many states and communities are not yet able to adequately fund such efforts, and federal funding falls *far* short of meeting the need. In 2002, Title V was funded at \$95 million, Title II was funded at \$89 million, JABG was funded at \$249 million and juvenile justice funding as a whole equaled about \$550 million. In contrast, last year, juvenile justice programs only received about \$300 million, including \$64 million for Title V, \$79 million for Title II, \$55 million for JABG and \$80 million for juvenile mentoring. I urge you to, at a minimum restore funding to the 2002 levels for Title II, Title V and JABG, and to fund juvenile mentoring at \$80 million. I also urge you to fully fund the programs recently authorized by the Second Chance Act, including funding the Adult and Juvenile Offender State and Local Reentry Demonstration Projects at the authorized amount of \$55 million. If we, as a nation, continue to refuse to adequately invest in proven crime-prevention strategies, we are not only failing to give a chance for a better future to millions of kids but are also permitting the further cultivation of criminals—jeopardizing the safety of all Americans for years to come.

Law enforcement leaders' commitment to putting dangerous criminals in jail must be matched by Congress' commitment to keep kids from becoming criminals. On behalf of my fellow law enforcement leaders around the country, I urge you to increase our nation's investments in these proven crime-prevention strategies that save lives and taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our views on how your Subcommittee can invest in approaches that will reduce crime and make us all safer.