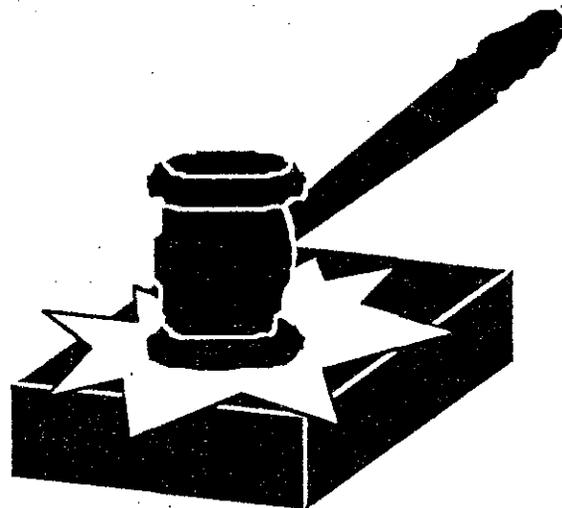

**AN ANALYSIS OF JUVENILE HOMICIDES:
WHERE THEY OCCUR AND THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF ADULT COURT
INTERVENTION**



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An unprecedented and rapidly developing trend — the transfer of juvenile offenders into the adult prison system at increasingly younger ages — is creating increasing strain on our country's criminal justice system. The adult prison system, focused on punishment and failing on its own accord, is ill-equipped to handle this new challenge. Yet critics complain that the juvenile court, with its focus on rehabilitation, job training and "second chances," has failed in its mission. A single problem is driving this policy nationwide. The problem is violent juvenile crime, especially juvenile homicide. The problem is so serious it terrifies entire neighborhoods and leaves little children planning their own funerals.¹

This study examines where juvenile homicides occur and finds that juvenile homicide is highly site-specific. Six states account for more than half of the country's juvenile homicide arrests, and just four cities account for nearly a third of the juvenile homicide arrests. These cities, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Detroit contain 3.7 million juveniles, just 5.3% of the juveniles nationwide. Thus, cities that contain one in twenty juveniles nationwide account for one in three juvenile homicide arrests. The problem is so site-specific that fully 82% of the counties in the country had zero known juvenile homicide offenders in 1994. Communities from Maine to Utah, Minnesota to Tennessee, are being subjected to federal legislation and mandates designed around a small number of violent juvenile offenders from the South Bronx and South Central Los Angeles.

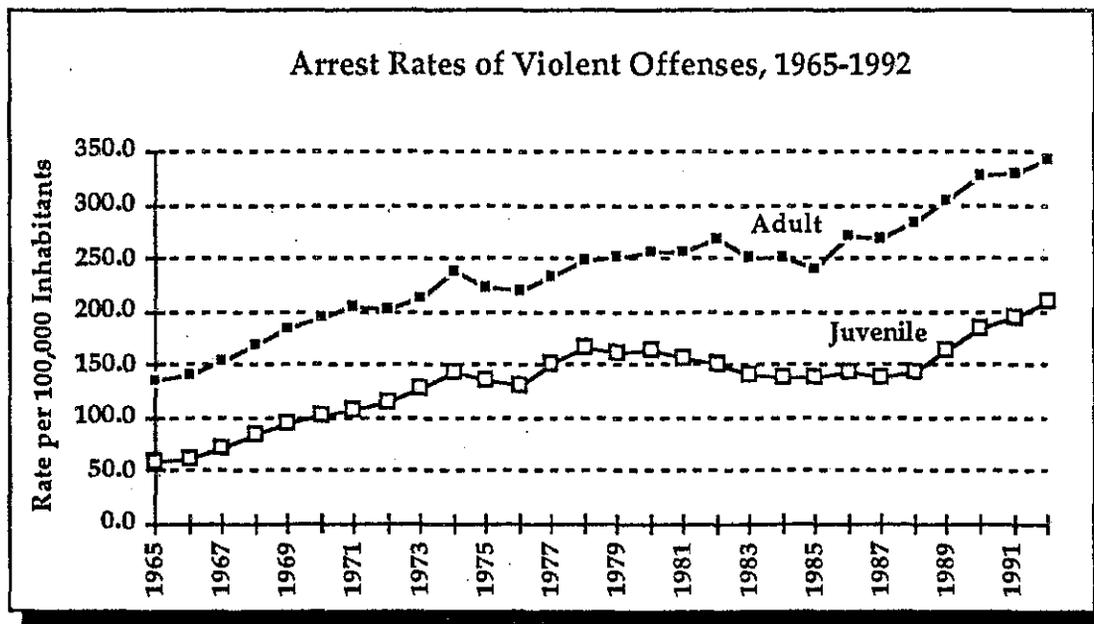
In addition, this study examines the relationship between transferring children to adult court and violent crime. The transferring of more juveniles to adult court is

being promoted as an effort to increase public safety, so we decided to examine whether states with high levels of transfer have lower rates of juvenile homicide. We found they do not. Some states have high transfer and high juvenile homicide, some have low transfer and low juvenile homicide; still others have high transfer and low juvenile homicide or low transfer and high juvenile homicide. There is no correlation between rates of transfer and rates of juvenile homicide.

I. Crime Trends : How Extensive Is Violent Juvenile Crime?

From 1965 to 1992, the rate of arrests of juveniles for violent crime rose from 50 per 100,000 citizens to over 150 per 100,000. As Figure 1 indicates, overall arrests for violent crime of juveniles and adults increased almost in parallel between 1965 and 1992 and juveniles do not appear exceptional in this regard. Arrests for both age groups increased through the 1960's and 1970's, leveled a bit during the 1980's, and then resumed their increase in the 1990's. Yet it is adults, not juveniles, who drive overall crime rates. Eighty one percent of arrests are of people over 18 years old.

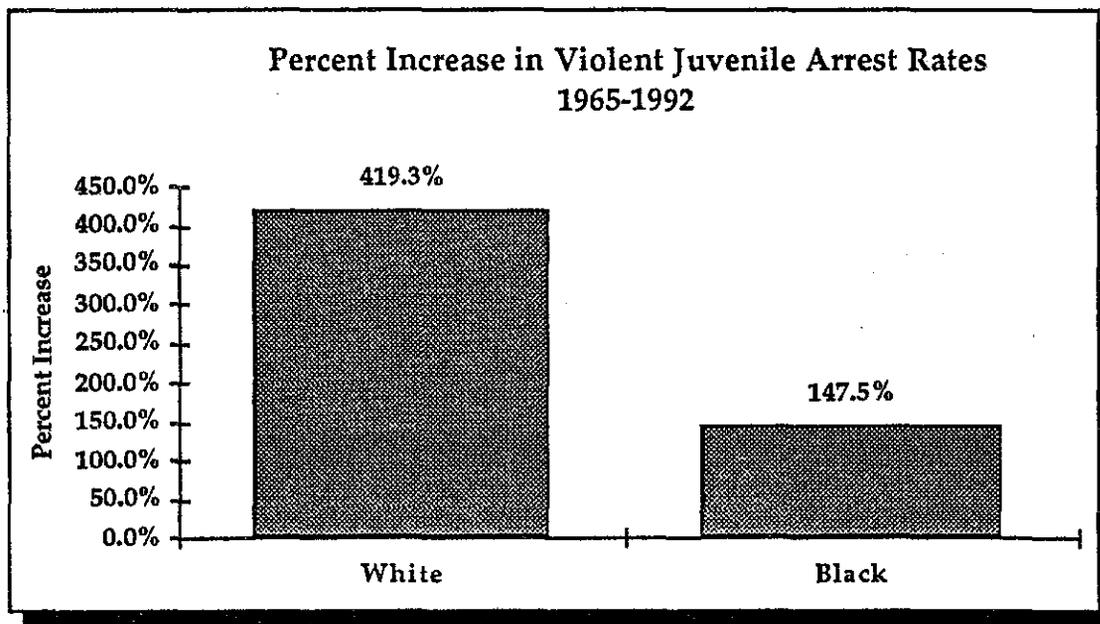
Figure 1



Source: U.S. Department of Justice • Federal Bureau of Investigation. (1993) *Age Specific Arrest Rates and Race Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses 1965-1992..*

Moreover, the violent crime arrest rate for white juveniles increased 419% from 1965 to 1992, compared to 147.5% for black juveniles, although the black juvenile arrest rate was substantially higher during this entire period.²

Figure 2



Source: U.S. Department of Justice • Federal Bureau of Investigation. (1993) *Age Specific Arrest Rates and Race Specific Arrest Rates for Selected Offenses 1965-1992*.

Finally, most arrests for juvenile crime are for non-violent offenses. Only six out of every 100 juvenile arrests in 1994 were for violent crimes (compared to 13 out of 100 for adults).³ Of those violent crime arrests, the majority (56%) were for assault, an extremely flexible juvenile crime category that can include shouting without physical contact or schoolyard fights in which nobody is injured. Less than 4 of every 1000 juvenile arrests are for murder or rape.

Figure 3

The Most Common Juvenile Arrests	
Larceny-Theft (shoplifting)	18.7%
Public Order (disorderly conduct, trespassing)	17.4%
Status Offenses (conduct that would not be criminal if done by an adult, e.g., cigarette smoking, truancy)	13.9%

Source: U.S. Department of Justice • Federal Bureau of Investigation. (1995) *Crime in the United States 1994*.

One type of violent juvenile crime shows genuine and shocking increases. Youth homicide rates have tripled since the late 1980's, which stands in sharp contrast to stability in the adult homicide rate. The number of homicides by youth that involved firearms *quadrupled* between 1984 and 1994.⁴

II. Juvenile Homicides: Where Do They Occur?

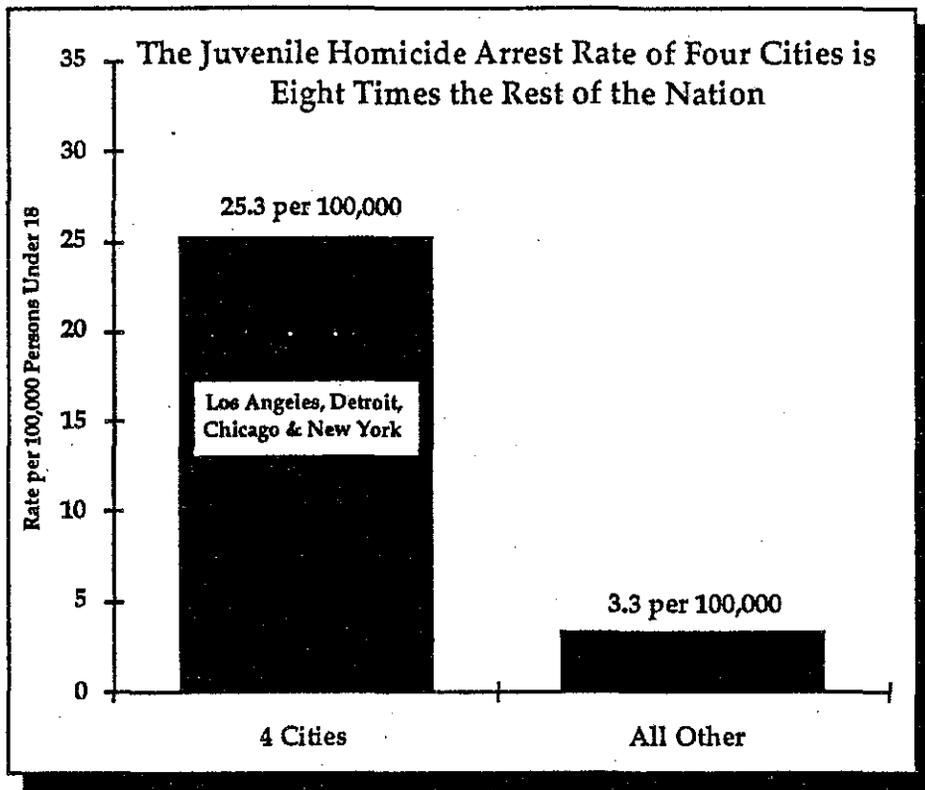
Americans need to be concerned about juvenile homicide wherever it occurs. A single killing in any city diminishes the entire nation. But the reality is that very few Americans are in personal danger of homicide victimization at the hands of a juvenile. Our research reveals that just four cities — Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Detroit — had a combined total of 929 juvenile homicide arrests in 1994, accounting for 30% of the 3,102 juvenile homicide arrests in the nation. Yet those four cities contain only 5.3% of the juveniles nationwide and only 3% of the overall population. Thus, cities that contain just one in twenty children nationwide account for one in three of the juvenile homicide arrests.

Figure 4

Four Cities Account for 30% of All Juvenile Homicide Arrests	
City	Juvenile Homicide Arrests, 1994 ⁵
Chicago	288
Los Angeles	232
New York	209
Detroit	200

Source: Analysis of data from the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program

Figure 5



Source: Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau and FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program

We suspect that if more refined data were available, it would show that juvenile homicide in those cities is further concentrated into certain neighborhoods. South Central Los Angeles suffers far more homicides than West Los Angeles. A study in New York found that three quarters of the inmates in the entire state prison system came from just seven neighborhoods in New York City. Many residents of the affected communities justifiably live in constant fear and are desperate for relief. The rest of the nation is vicariously afraid of the violent juvenile crime they see on the news, but they are not themselves at imminent risk.

Further analysis reveals that in 1993, six states, Florida, Michigan, Illinois, New York, Texas and California accounted for 56% of all juvenile homicide arrests in the country. A further breakdown by the National Center for Juvenile Justice found that 92% of the counties in the country had one or fewer known juvenile homicide offenders in 1994.⁶ Eighty two percent of the counties had *zero* known juvenile homicide offenders.

Figure 6

State Juvenile Homicide Arrests, 1993		
State	Number of Juvenile Homicide Arrests	Rate per 100,000
Alabama	43	4.23
Alaska	5	2.79
Arizona	46	4.53
Arkansas	48	7.59
California	621	7.27
Colorado	35	4.47
Connecticut	26	3.97
Delaware	0	0.00
Florida	205	6.90
Georgia	91	6.11
Hawaii	1	0.33
Idaho	1	0.38
Illinois	288 ⁷	n/a
Indiana	20	2.25
Iowa	7	1.34
Kansas	n/a	n/a
Kentucky	16	3.43
Louisiana	103	13.82
Maine	0	0.00
Maryland	138	11.12
Massachusetts	26	2.52
Michigan	208	9.39
Minnesota	34	2.82
Mississippi	25	10.20
Missouri	142	16.54
Montana	1	0.96
Nebraska	5	1.23
Nevada	12	3.94
New Hampshire	0	0.00
New Jersey	63	3.42
New Mexico	9	3.75
New York	264	6.91
North Carolina	96	5.80
North Dakota	1	0.69
Ohio	76	4.43
Oklahoma	43	5.04
Oregon	13	1.72
Pennsylvania	82	3.83
Rhode Island	11	4.82
South Carolina	43	4.64
South Dakota	1	0.69
Tennessee	24	3.26
Texas	367	7.33
Utah	6	0.98
Vermont	1	1.47
Virginia	77	4.84
Washington	28	2.75
West Virginia	10	2.32
Wisconsin	118	8.87

Wyoming	3	2.51
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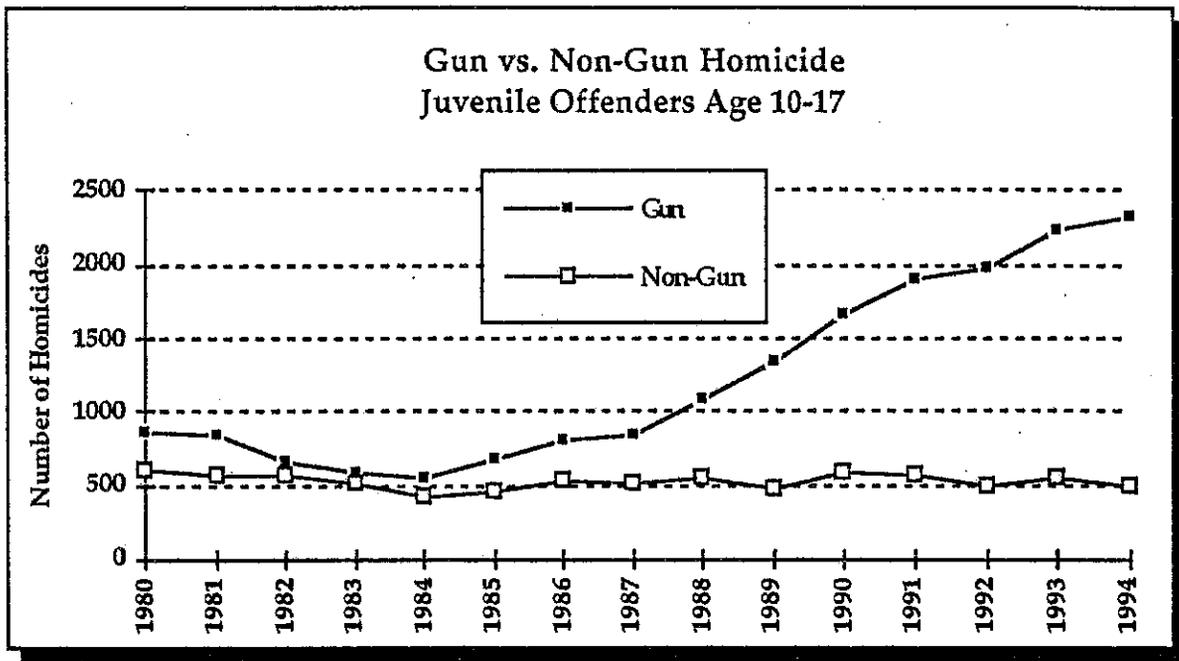
Source: U.S. Department of Justice • Bureau of Justice Statistics. (1995)

Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1994

III. There is a Direct Link Between Juvenile Homicides and Firearms

The increase in juvenile homicides over the past ten years is unequivocally linked to firearms. Until the mid 1980's the rates of juvenile homicide were relatively stable and the weapons used in the offenses were closely split between guns and other weapons. In 1987 that started to change. The number of juvenile homicides with a firearm started to spiral upwards while the number of non-firearm homicides stayed steady or decreased. Figure 7 illustrates that *all* of the increase in juvenile homicide in recent years has involved guns, so that by 1991 nearly 80% of the youth homicides were committed with firearms.

Figure 7



Source: U. S. Department of Justice • Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (February 1996). *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1996 Update on Violence*.

The homicide data corroborates other data about the prevalence of guns among youth in America. According to a 1996 report of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: ⁸

- In 1990, one in 20 high school students reported carrying a firearm during the previous 30 days.

- Teenage boys are more likely to die from gunshot wounds than all natural causes combined.
- Homicides involving firearms has been the leading cause of death for black males between ages 15 to 19 since 1969 and that rate more than doubled between 1979 and 1989.
- Firearm-related death is the second leading cause of injury-related death in the US. In California, firearm deaths became the number one cause of death for juveniles last year.

These data suggest that making efforts to keep firearms out of the hands of youth would substantially reduce the incidence of juvenile homicide.

IV. Transferring Juveniles to Adult Court Does Not Help, and May Make Problems Worse

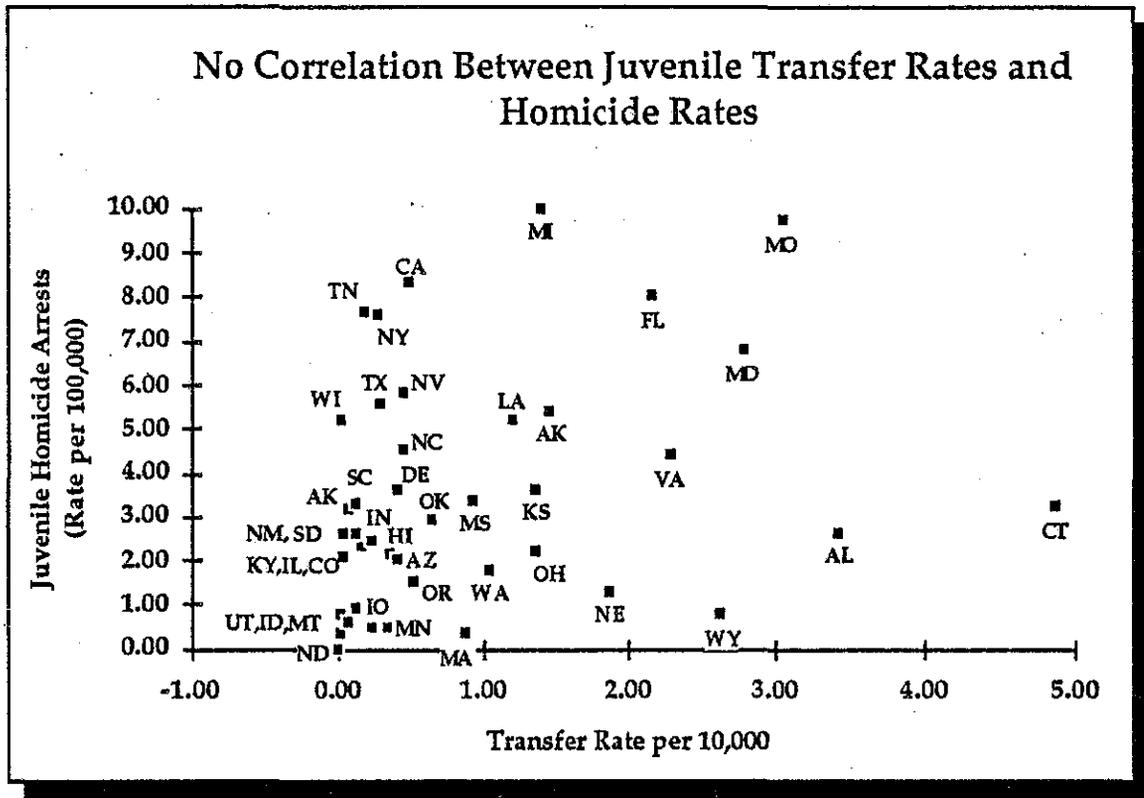
Frustrated about the problem of youth violence, current legislation proposes to increase the transfer of juvenile offenders into the adult criminal justice system. The theory is that an increasing number of children are simply too vicious to be handled in juvenile court, with its focus on rehabilitation, and they must therefore be sent to adult court, with its focus on punishment. Legislation under consideration at the federal level adds new offenses to the list of those that lead to transfer to adult court, and *requires* states to transfer some 14 year old children to adult court in order to qualify for federal funds.

These proposals do not take into account the differing needs of America's communities and their existing authority to transfer juvenile offenders into adult court. All 50 states and the District of Columbia currently have the authority to process violent juvenile offenders into adult court;⁹ in fact, between 1989 and 1993, the number of juvenile offenders transferred increased by 41%. Despite this major policy shift, the number and rate of juvenile homicide arrests in major cities continued to increase.

In order to examine whether increased transfer was associated with decreased homicide by juvenile offenders, we compared the per capita transfer rates with the per capita youth homicide rate in each of the fifty states and found no correlation.

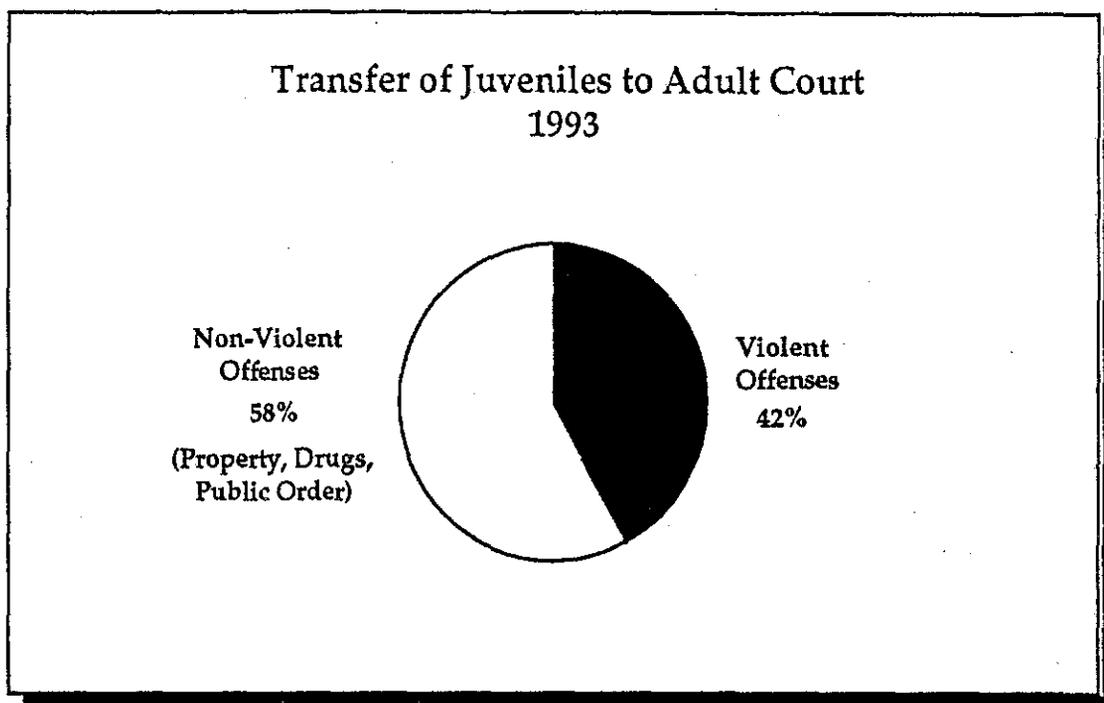
The data do not show that states with higher transfer rates have lower youth homicide rates. Connecticut has the highest transfer rate in the nation, and it has the same youth homicide rate as Colorado, whose transfer rate is nearly zero. Michigan and Massachusetts have nearly the same transfer rates, but their youth homicide rates are among the highest and lowest, respectively. Figure 8¹⁰ illustrates the complete absence of correlation on this issue.

Figure 8



Additionally, an analysis of the crimes for which juvenile offenders are sent into the adult criminal justice system shows that more juveniles are transferred for non-violent offenses than for violent offenses.¹¹ As Figure 9 indicates, the majority of juvenile transfers involved property or drugs; 10% of the transfers involved offenses against public order like disorderly conduct. This disparity is especially serious because so many more children are being transferred now than ever before. Indeed, if the goal is to target violent juvenile offenders, these data suggest that transfer is being overused.

Figure 9



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (March 1996.) *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1996 Update on Violence:*

Rather than reducing juvenile crime, recent research has found that transfer to adult court is associated with *higher* rates of recidivism. A 1996 study in Florida found that youth transferred to adult prisons reoffended approximately 30% more frequently than youth who stayed in the juvenile system.¹² This study was conducted with youth who were matched for seriousness of the transfer offense, number of charges, number of prior offenses, severity of prior offenses, and socio-demographic characteristics. The higher recidivism rate reflects the harsh and debilitating conditions present in adult correctional facilities.

V. Recommendations

The above data make it clear that subjecting an increasing numbers of juvenile offenders to a failing adult criminal justice system is a distinct public safety threat to American communities. This policy has failed to reduce violent juvenile crime and has turned out more crime-prone "graduates" of America's adult prison systems. Due to data revealing a concentration of juvenile homicides in America's largest cities, a focused intervention approach aimed at identified cities — targeting gun abatement, youth employment and increased recreational opportunities — would yield the highest return in terms of reducing violent juvenile crime.

1. *Get guns out of the hands of kids*

To combat the increase in gun violence by America's youth we recommend the following multifaceted approach:

- a. Allocation of at least \$25 million for gun buyback programs for cities that account for most of America's juvenile homicides.

In an effort to reduce the supply of weapons in St. Louis, the police department raised \$25,000 through a combination of donations from corporate sponsors and funds generated from drug seizures which they then used to buy back guns from citizens. At \$50 for a handgun and \$25 for a long-barrel shotgun, they were able to buy back 7,547 guns, 703 of which were either stolen or illegal.¹³ To further heighten community awareness of the problem of gun violence, recovered firearms were melted down and used to create a memorial statue to Christopher Harris, a 9-year old killed in random gunfire.

If the St. Louis ratio held true for other cities, a \$25 million allocation would result in removing over 700,000 illegal or stolen guns off the streets of America. This number could be increased by using the federal funds as seed money to raise matching funds or in-kind contributions from the private sector.

b. Comprehensive local ordinances designed to limit the supply of firearms.

In *Reducing Gun Violence: What Communities Can Do*, the National Crime Prevention Council cited the following mechanisms that states and municipalities can use, separately or in combination, to reduce the availability of firearms:¹⁴

- limiting the number of guns a consumer can purchase within a given period;
- taxing weapons and ammunition;
- banning certain types of weapons;
- requiring extensive background checks and waiting periods before purchases can be completed;
- requiring certain safety measures for storage of firearms;
- requiring the purchaser be a certain age;
- requiring the purchaser take part in a safety training program before being licensed.

In addition to these local initiatives, we applaud the recent Federal/local partnerships to trace gun ownership of weapons used in criminal activity and to close down firearms dealers who illegally sell guns. Together with the aforementioned recommendations, such policies can help substantially reduce both firearm availability and violent crime, especially among juveniles.

c. Federal legislation mandating that guns produced in America meet the same standards as guns which are imported into America, thereby substantially curtailing the production of so-called "Saturday Night Specials."

Low cost, poorly manufactured, easily concealed handguns — often dubbed "Saturday Night Specials" — are 3.4 times more likely to be involved in a crime as other guns. Sixty-two percent of crime guns traced by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and 8 of the top ten categories of guns confiscated in California were manufactured by a chain of 7 gun manufacturers in Southern California. The manufacture of most of these substandard, crime-prone handguns would be prohibited if import standards were simply applied to local gun manufacturing.¹⁵

d. Increased taxation of handguns and handgun ammunition.

Raising the cost of purchasing ammunition can provide a barrier to criminal gun use. Some legislators have proposed increasing taxes on ammunition to raise the cost of firing a weapon. Funds generated from these increased taxes can be used to support gun buyback programs and to research the effectiveness of a variety of firearm abatement approaches.

2. *Put Youth To Work*

Since 1980, the nation has tripled its prison population and quadrupled its criminal justice expenditures. During this time government expenditures on criminal justice escalated from \$26 billion to over \$100 billion annually. California, our nation's largest state, is itself a study in ironies, boasting the nation's highest juvenile incarceration rate, highest juvenile unemployment rate, and most crowded classrooms. This is not surprising given that over the past decade California built 16 prisons and one university.

To increase employment opportunities for youths we offer the following recommendations:

a. *Jobs for kids.*

Job programs, particularly those which also offer intensive educational and counseling support, have been shown to reduce criminal behavior among youth, increase the likelihood that they will obtain high school diplomas, increase their incomes, and reduce reliance on public support.¹⁶ A recent research report by the RAND Corporation found that high school students who participated in a graduation incentive program were arrested 70% less frequently than a control group. RAND estimated that every million dollars spent on such a program would prevent 250 crimes. Dollar for dollar, the RAND study shows a graduation incentive program would prevent five times as many serious crimes as would be averted by California's *Three Strikes and You're Out* law.¹⁷

Similarly, research on the JOBSTART program — a program which combined basic academic skills, occupation skills training for specific jobs, job placement assistance

and other support services — revealed that non-participants were 63% more likely to get arrested than were JOBSTART participants. An evaluation of the Federal Job Corps program — a residential program for low income youth combining remedial education, vocational skills training and health care — showed that after six months, Job Corps participants were five times as likely to have obtained a high school diploma or GED than non-participants. Program participants also showed significantly lower rates of criminal behavior, even four years after program completion. Summer Youth Employment Program participants were significantly more likely to be in school and to be employed part-time than non-participants.¹⁸

b. Healthy recreational outlets

Political derision aside, there is a growing body of evidence which indicates that by providing enhanced recreational activities for kids, cities around America have reduced juvenile crime.

The city of Phoenix provided an unintended, although enlightening, "experiment" in this area. Between 1991 and 1993 Phoenix was intermittently able to afford to extend the hours when recreational facilities were kept open and staffed to 2 am. During extended recreation hour periods, juvenile crime dropped by as much as 55%. When funding dried up for extended recreation hours, juvenile crime rose again, only to be reduced when funds were found to keep recreational centers open.¹⁹

Similar reductions in juvenile crime were associated with extending recreational opportunities in Cincinnati, Ohio (down 24%)²⁰; Norfolk, Virginia (down 29%)²¹; Dallas, Texas (down 26%)²²; and Kansas City, Missouri (down 25%)²³. No other crime fighting plan has achieved such astonishing results — not prison, not police, not chain gangs. Organized sports can also provide incentives for teamwork and self-discipline, and recreational centers can serve as clearinghouses of information on job opportunities and community events.

3. *Depoliticize Juvenile Justice Legislation*

The spate of juvenile justice legislation appearing in Congress and state houses across the country, accompanied by vitriolic rhetoric defining America's youth as

potential "superpredators," portends a disturbing trend for policy formulation in the juvenile justice arena. Election-year legislation crafted during highly emotional times often has perverse results.

In the 1970s, for example, the state of New York lowered the age at which juveniles can be tried as adults to as young as 13. All youth age 16 and older are tried in adult court in New York State. Despite this massive and long-term experiment with a more punitive approach to juvenile crime, New York has the highest rate of violent juvenile crime in the country, *twice the national average*.²⁴

a. Impose a moratorium on juvenile justice legislation and comprehensively analyze adult court intervention efforts.

Recent changes in juvenile law have occurred at a breathtaking pace, with approximately half of all states recently amending their waiver laws to either lower the age of waiver, create categories of crimes for which youth are automatically tried as adults, or transfer the discretion over juvenile waiver from judges to prosecutors. Data presented in this analysis indicate that states will be disappointed by the crime-control results of those legislative actions, perhaps prompting new calls for increased toughness on juveniles.

The State of Virginia provides a classic example of political rhetoric getting ahead of policy concerns. In 1994, Virginia lowered the age at which juveniles could be tried as adults to 14. Before the juvenile crime rates were even available to analyze the impact of those changes, the legislature, governor, and attorney general united on further sweeping juvenile justice legislation which opened juvenile court proceedings to public purview; mandatorily tried certain 14-year-olds as adults; and granted prosecutors sole discretion over many juvenile waiver decisions. Lost in the fevered rush to pass even tougher legislation than the 1994 version was the fact that Virginia already had a relatively low rate of violent juvenile crime (36th amongst 44 states available for analysis) and that six out of seven 14 year-olds tried as adults under the 1994 law were African American.

With such unprecedented state-by-state actions, now is hardly the time for Federal legislation to impose mandates on states to further lower the age of waiver. In fact, the individual state actions can provide a natural laboratory to evaluate the

effectiveness of juvenile waiver on juvenile crime. Congress should immediately fund a major, objective fact-finding analysis of the impact of juvenile waiver which looks at: (1) comparative intra-state changes in juvenile crime in states which have substantially changed their waiver laws; (2) inter-state analyses between states which have initiated substantial juvenile waiver changes and those which have not; and (3) the effectiveness of changes in waiver laws versus other prevention, law enforcement and gun abatement efforts designed to reduce juvenile crime. Ultimately, the analysis should include comprehensive recommendations driven by policy — not political — considerations.

b. Reauthorize the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

With a certain and unequivocal 23% increase expected in the number of juveniles over the next decade, few would argue against major initiatives focusing on today's toddlers to prevent them from becoming tomorrow's inmates. Now is not the time to be abolishing the very federal office designed to prevent juvenile crime. We recommend the reauthorization of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), even if only for a two-year period, during which time it can oversee the aforementioned juvenile waiver study. During this time, the shape that OJJDP should take can be the subject of a full and informed debate, complete with data about the impact of a more punitive approach to juvenile crime.

Conclusion

Juvenile crime is a serious problem in our society. Reducing juvenile crime is not a question of being "tough" or "soft," it is a question of creating a safer society. The challenge is to create short term solutions that respond to immediate needs and long term solutions that address underlying problems. We urge legislators everywhere to identify specific problems and to craft solutions that are proven to work.

MYTHS AND REALITIES

- *Myth #1: Everybody is at risk of violent death at the hands of a juvenile*

Reality: Juvenile homicide is a highly localized occurrence affecting a relatively small number of people nationwide. Just four cities account for nearly a third of the juvenile homicide arrests. 92% of the counties had zero or one known juvenile homicide offenders in 1994.

- *Myth #2: Transferring juveniles to adult court will reduce homicide*

Reality: States with high rates of transfer do not have lower rates of juvenile homicide; there is no correlation between transfer and juvenile homicide rates in a comparison among states. Further, transfer of juveniles to adult courts increases reoffense rates on the order of 30%.

- *Myth #3: Our nation is being overrun by violent youth predators*

Reality: Only 0.4% of youth age 10 to 17 are arrested for any kind of violent offense in a year; just 0.01% are arrested for a homicide.

- *Myth #4: Juvenile homicide is rising across the board*

Reality: All of the increase in juvenile homicide is firearms related. Juvenile homicide with guns has quadrupled in the past ten years; non-gun homicide has not changed.

- *Myth #5: Children only get transferred to adult court for serious violent offenses*

Reality: More children get transferred for non-violent offenses than violent offense. New, broader statutes will lower the threshold for transfer, increasing the number of children who commit less serious offenses who get transferred to adult court.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The National Center on Institutions and Alternatives, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, and the authors of this report would like to thank some of the many people who made this report possible. Christopher Davis of CJCJ and Mary Cate Rush of NCIA assembled much of the data behind this report, and Howard Snyder of the National Center on Juvenile Justice supplied key pieces of information and advice. Yohannes Assefa also provided crucial logistical support.

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