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Curfew Enforcement: Another Bad Policy to Waste Valuable Police Resources

San Francisco communities are ravaged by violence and families are understandably desperate for solutions. However, the Mayor's announcement that the city plans to use police to enforce a night-time curfew for children is simply false hope for families who deserve much more. The Mayor's decision to spend \$660,000 in overtime pay to direct police officers to enforce a longstanding curfew is a misdirected policy with no supporting evidence to indicate it will reduce crime or violence in San Francisco.

The curfew targets youth 13 years and younger who are out in public between midnight and 6 am. While society certainly should not condone the presence of children on the street during these hours, a concerted effort to focus on and detain this population serves no useful crime or violence prevention strategy.

From the standpoint of curbing youth violence, evidence shows that most youth offending occurs between 3pm and 6pm. Further evidence shows that juvenile crime rates are at low levels that do not justify the exorbitant expenditure of funds for overtime police patrols. In the last two years, juvenile homicide has been extremely low: one arrest in 2004 and one arrest in 2005. Juvenile violent crime is also down over the last two years compared to rates for every year since 1995. Based on the declining rates among juveniles, the Mayor's

focus on the under-14 age group is unwarranted for the purpose of crime reduction.

From the standpoint of preventing harm to youth, a curfew that places youth in contact with police only serves to begin the criminalization that follows early exposure to the juvenile justice system. Studies confirm, again and again, that early contact with police does not forestall criminal offending. The funds the Mayor is dedicating to this ill-conceived plan would be better spent on community programs and workers that effectively respond to youth in crisis on the streets.

The Mayor's office is using valuable police resources to target a vulnerable population. San Francisco would be better served by directing its attention to evidence-based approaches that could and should be institutionalized by the government agencies responsible for supporting San Francisco's youth—the juvenile justice system, the schools, the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families. Instead, San Francisco citizens are being cajoled by this symbolic reassurance that the Mayor is focusing on crime and violence reduction, when in fact, this policy is just another part in his piecemeal approach to fighting crime, implemented without the support of the community, the organizations who serve youth or research on juvenile crime reduction.

This statement is endorsed by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) and Coleman Advocates.

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