

Testimony of  
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STATEMENT  
OF  
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PATRICK L. MEEHAN,  
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
CONCERNING  
YOUTH VIOLENCE AND MENTORING PROGRAMS  
PRESENTED ON  
FEBRUARY 19, 2007  
AT  
CONSTITUTION CENTER  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Good morning:

Combating violence in neighborhoods is a top priority of U. S. Attorneys across the nation. Through the Department of Justice's signature program, Project Safe Neighborhoods, my colleagues and I are coordinating the efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement and community groups against gun crime. This includes maximizing the use of federal laws like the armed career criminal statute, and the Hobbs Act, to remove the most dangerous criminals from the neighborhoods and to combat gangs and drug trafficking organizations.

Moreover, I previously served for six years as a county District Attorney. There, our juvenile justice system helped deter crime through prevention efforts aimed at our most serious threat-at-risk juveniles with a propensity toward violence.

Accordingly, I am pleased to have this opportunity to share with the Committee some of my thoughts about programs that are having an impact on violence in our region, particularly with dangerous juveniles.

I will focus my remarks on three outstanding programs which include both a mentoring component, and a strong law enforcement message to at-risk youth who find themselves at a

crossroads in their lives. These programs are: The Youth Violence Reduction Project, Don't Fall Down in the Hood, and the Glen Mills Community Management Services Program.

A common characteristic of these three programs is a focus on comprehensive intervention with young persons most likely to seriously harm others or to be harmed themselves. Each seeks to deter individuals from choices that increase their exposure to harm while promoting accountability, responsibility, and personal development. Each attempts to show dangerous juveniles that there is an alternative to violence and a future beyond crime.

#### A. The Youth Violence Reduction Program

The Youth Violence Reduction Program (YVRP) continues to be a great success story. This program provides intensive support with graduated sanctions for noncompliance for youths aged 24 and younger, who are at the greatest risk of killing or being killed. YVRP began in June of 1999 in the 24th, Philadelphia Police District. It has been repeatedly expanded, and now includes 100 active youth partners in five police districts including the 12th, 19th, 22nd, 24th, and 25th. The agencies partnering in this effort include the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, the Philadelphia Police Department, Philadelphia Adult and Juvenile Probation, Philadelphia Anti-Drug Anti-Violence Network, Safe and Sound, Public/Private Ventures, The Department of Human Services, The School District, The Department of Behavioral Health, and others.

The results of this effort have been particularly promising, especially in light of the overall increase in violence in the city. According to the District Attorney's Office, when a comparison was made of the homicides in three of the police districts for the years just prior to YVRP's initiation in the districts, the results have been significant: for youths 24 and under, homicides decreased 46% in the 24th district, 48% in the 25th district, and 9% in the 12th district.

While the USAO has not been directly involved in the operations of the YVRP, as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, from 2003 to 2006, the USAO was able to facilitate the funding of \$700,000 for YVRP.

#### B. Don't Fall Down in the Hood

A second program with which we have closely worked is "Don't Fall Down in the Hood," a program offered by the Institute for the Advancement of African-AmerOne comment suggested eliminating this sentence. We would prefican Youth. This is a city-funded program, that works with juvenile offenders, ages 14-18, after their first arrest for narcotics, assault, firearms, and other offenses. The ultimate goal of this program is reducing the criminal behavior of the offenders while showing them how to take advantage of meaningful opportunities in the community. The teens are referred to the program mostly from the Philadelphia Family Court and the Youth Study Center. The program lasts up to four months and includes rigorous training and education in computer literacy, conflict resolution, basic business skills, money management, decision making, time management, and goal setting. As part of the program, the students receive presentations from professionals to educate them about life and death decisions and alternatives to violence.

Assistants in my office regularly speak to the kids about the dangers and consequences of gun violence. In fact, my office produced a 22-minute documentary, which includes segments of classes with Don't Fall Down in the Hood students, and focuses on the dangers of firearms violence and the potential penalties that result when a case is brought into federal court. This video has been shown not only in Philadelphia but in cities across the country.

According to Archie Leacock, the Executive Director of the program, to date, Don't Fall Down in the Hood has included more than 860 youths. A study of the program by the Department of Human Services, Court and Community Division revealed that only three percent of the participants committed criminal offenses while in the program and only seven percent committed an offense following their completion of the program. Mr. Leacock, who has done magnificent work stretching his minimal resources, has commented to us that Don't Fall Down in the Hood, "saves the lives of the kids and makes their neighborhoods safer. Without it, these kids may very well be dead or in jail."

### C. Glen Mills Community Service Management Program

The third program of note is The Community Management Services Program of The Glen Mills Schools. It includes a strong component of aftercare. This provides reintegration services for court-adjudicated juveniles who are returning to a community after completing a residential commitment. Like adult prisoners after incarceration, they face unique pressures and tough choices upon a return to their neighborhoods. Juveniles participate in creating a transition plan and are supervised face to face upon their reintegration. They receive assistance in school re-entry, employment search, individual counseling, and family meetings and 24-hour crisis intervention is available if called for. The goal is to reduce overall recidivism by providing additional structure to sustain the growth and change made in placement. While pre-adjudication and truancy services are also part of the "Community Management Model," the value in building upon the progress made during juvenile commitment cannot be underestimated.

### D. Other Promising Programs

Please allow me to conclude my testimony by observing that intensive intervention is a critical component of anti-violence efforts, but other longer term interventions also play a vital role in keeping our communities safe. For example, anti-truancy programs that identify chronically truant juveniles and reestablish them in age appropriate remedial education are a proven deterrent to crime. The grim reality facing many young people today is that the difference between the road taken and not taken is often the difference between life and death.

Another target population for intervention is children with a parent or parents in prison. Statistics have shown that the children of adults who are incarcerated are among the most likely to one day be incarcerated themselves. Two programs which effectively intervene with those children are the Amachi Program, which is championed by former Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode, and the U.S. Dream Academy, Inc., which is led by Reverend Wintley Phipps.

Finally, unmarried teen-aged mothers and their children are often at the greatest risk of becoming entrenched in a lifestyle of poverty and family dysfunction that is often a precursor to future trouble. A tremendous program is the Nurse Family Partnership; a home visitation program that

provides support, education and counseling on health, parenting and self sufficiency to low-income first time mothers. The program provides children with a better start in life by helping mothers develop good parenting skills. Statistics have shown that women who participate in this program are significantly less likely to abuse or neglect their children, and are likely to finish their education and move off welfare and into gainful employment.

In conclusion, law enforcement is one critical piece of a solution to the problems of crime and violence, particularly among juveniles. But a comprehensive approach which includes interventions like the kinds I have mentioned today increase the capacity, we have to keep our neighborhoods safe and to steer young people away from bad choices before it is too late.