

Ward 6 Juvenile Crime Task Force Proposed Initiatives to Reduce Juvenile Crime

Increase Public Transparency and Government Accountability

1. Reform the District’s confidentiality laws so the Department of Youth and Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), DC Public Schools (DCPS), DC Housing Authority (DCHA), the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and related service providers share information about juveniles who commit crimes, especially violent crimes.

Current confidentiality laws, while intended to protect youths, at times create barriers and isolate at-risk youth and their families from support and intervention. Agencies are too often unable to share information about at-risk youth until too late – not only after the crime has occurred, but in many cases only after the youth has been arrested, tried and convicted. The confidentiality laws that create this reporting barrier need to be changed so that agencies and service providers can coordinate to take action at the earliest indication that a youth is in need of services and supports.

2. Mandate the creation of an interagency database and assessment tool for tracking at-risk youth.

The Ward 6 Juvenile Crime Task Force has reviewed the effectiveness of maintaining integrated databases for high-risk youth. The District is lacking and should expand electronic databases and fully integrate the databases of related agencies including DYRS, MPD, DCPS and DPR.

3. Make juvenile violent crime data available to the community.

Comprehensive and public data is needed for a community to address juvenile violent crime, including, arrest, charge and conviction data, as well as information at the neighborhood level of the Police Service Area (PSA) regarding the location of violent crime and residence of the juvenile arrested for and convicted of a violent crime. A requirement should be made for the Office of the Attorney General to create a public report with this information.

Increase Meaningful Juvenile Offender Accountability

1. Streamline and strengthen the government’s ability to revoke a committed youth’s right to stay in a community placement.

DYRS must be able to revoke a youth quickly if they violate the conditions of their release and community placement. Currently, DYRS must schedule and await the decision of a revocation panel before a juvenile can be taken back into secure detention; costing valuable time and leaving the youth and community at-risk. DYRS should be able to pull an at-risk youth off the streets immediately if necessary.

2. Increase compliance with mandated community service for juveniles.

When a juvenile commits a crime, they rarely understand the impact their action has not just on the victim, but also on the community where the crime took place. Judges often require 90 hours of community service to connect youth to their crimes and the impact they have on their community, but compliance and follow-up is not consistent.

Address Truancy in DC Schools

1. Amend DC law to require families with children 13 years or younger that miss 10 days of school without an excuse be referred to Child Protective Services (CFSA) for investigation and/or assessment.

Truancy is one of the greatest predictors for an at-risk youth to lead to criminal activities. Currently, youth 13 years of age and younger have to miss 20 unexcused days of school before Child Protective Services can contact the family. The rules should be changed to reduce the number of unexcused absences to 10 unexcused absences.

2. Provide truancy data to MPD, Department of Human Services, DC Housing Authority and neighborhood youth programs.

Data which can be used to help intervene with at-risk youth before crimes occur is currently not shared between relevant agencies.

Expand Innovations for Preventing Juvenile Crime

1. Expand the WRAP-Around Model for juvenile intervention.

The District has created a pilot program titled the DC Choices program, modeled after a proven and effective program in Milwaukee, WI called “Wraparound Milwaukee.” The initiative in Milwaukee has resulted in a 25% decline in juvenile violence and correctional commitments, in addition to significant cost savings to the city.

2. Expand the use of neighborhood volunteers for addressing gaps in youth programs in targeted neighborhoods.

Many neighborhoods in Ward 6 need programs for teenagers. Neighborhoods have community organizations and adult residents eager to volunteer to help youth in their community. Prevention and recreation services need to be expanded for children, youth and families of Ward 6, including new strategies to engage at-risk youth and families.

3. Create a Juvenile Crime Commission and Juvenile Crime Youth-Only Commission.

Juvenile crime is a community-based issue and the commission is meant to provide input and buy-in from neighbors and community based organizations struggling to reduce juvenile crime. These two commissions can work in tandem to gather community and youth ideas and feedback on ways to prevent and respond to juvenile crime.