

Youth Violence Panel Talking Points: Sheriff Morgan

Intro:

- Over the past few years there have been a number of high profile shootings, culminating in the recent tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut.
- This rash of devastating events has engendered an important national conversation about how we can prevent such tragedies in the future.
- Not surprisingly, this conversation has been dominated by debates on gun control and school security. While both are important, I think we would be remiss if we did not also take this opportunity to talk more broadly about our failure to adequately invest in approaches that reach at-risk and troubled youth *before* they commit crimes, resulting in not only better outcomes for the kids and their families, but also greater safety for the community as a whole.
- As a law enforcement officer of over 35 years—and as someone who has had this conversation too many times—I can tell you that the recipe for reducing youth violence starts with the evidence-based approaches that set kids on the right path, keep them there, and help those who stumble get back on track.
- I would like to point out that I am also a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national organization of more than 5,000 law enforcement leaders, like myself, who work to improve public safety by expanding access to proven programs for kids, particularly those most at-risk. I'd like to take a moment now to talk about some of these investments.

Research:

- Decades of research show that there are a number of evidence-based prevention and intervention approaches for children and youth that have proven to reduce later crime and violence. These effective approaches exist across the spectrum of development from birth to early adulthood.
- For example, approaches like high-quality home visitation and early learning work at the earliest possible moments to alter the life trajectories of at risk children.
 - o A study of one high-quality early learning program found that participants were 70 percent less likely to commit a violent crime by the age of 18
 - o Similarly, rigorous studies of the Nurse Family Partnership home visiting program found that participating children were half as likely to have been convicted of a crime by age 19.

- **For school-aged children, simple behavioral management programs can significantly reduce the likelihood of conduct disorders and disciplinary referrals, which can lead to suspensions and expulsions that put kids out on the street where they are more likely to engage in criminal activity.**
 - **One classroom level approach, the Good Behavior Game, was able to cut conduct disorders among participants in half by the time they entered the 6th grade.**
 - **Another school-wide approach, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), has also proven to be effective. One study of 37 elementary schools in Maryland found that the percentage of students with major or minor office disciplinary referrals decreased significantly in PBIS schools.**
- **In addition, for many school-aged children, high-quality juvenile mentoring programs, like Big Brothers Big Sisters, can help keep them on track**
 - **One Study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program found that those in the program were nearly one-third less likely to hit someone than their counterparts.**
- **For older youth that have already veered off the path and begun to offend, there are a number of intensive family therapy programs, like Multisystemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy that have proven effective in getting kids back on track.**
 - **These programs have shown through research to cut new arrests in half.**

Solutions:

- **Given that we already largely know what works to keep kids on track and away from crime and violence, one question we must ask ourselves is “what can we do to make sure more kids benefit from proven programs?”**
- **The federal government can, and should, play an instrumental role in advancing a proactive crime reduction approach through evidence-based programs.**
- **One way to facilitate this role is to support the Youth PROMISE legislation, which focuses federal investments on approaches that have been shown to be effective in reducing crime, especially juvenile delinquency.**
 - **This legislation is unique in that it does not take a one size fits all approach, rather it helps communities develop and implement plans, specific to their individual needs and strengths, which utilize evidence-based prevention and intervention approaches for at-risk and troubled youth.**
- **Another way to ensure that we are supporting evidence-based prevention programs for youth is by maintaining a strong commitment to federal Juvenile Justice funding. These funding streams can provide needed support for evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies. Unfortunately, these programs have yet to recover from funding cuts in the years since 2002, having sustained a 65 percent reduction in funding over this time period.**
 - **Federal juvenile justice funding streams include: titles II and V of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant, Juvenile Mentoring Grants, and the Second Chance Act**

- **Yet another way to leverage federal dollars to support approaches that can reduce crime and violence is to eliminate barriers within the health coverage system—such as in Medicaid—that prevent troubled kids from receiving mental health and behavioral health treatment.**
 - o These barriers include:
 - The termination rather than suspension of Medicaid benefits for youth in lockup, which results in a gap in coverage upon reentry into the community, when therapeutic services are most needed.
 - Inadequate screening for and diagnosis of kids’ mental and behavioral health problems
 - Lack of reimbursement for essential components of evidence-based programs (like MST) because such essential services are considered non-medical or are provided to family members of the child.

- **Last week, when the President unveiled his plan to protect our children from gun violence in the aftermath of the Newtown shooting, I was particularly pleased to see that it included recommendations to:**
 - o **1) Improve school climate through evidence-based school discipline approaches (as I described earlier, examples include the Good Behavior Game and PBIS); and**
 - o **2) Improve mental health services by making sure that we are doing a better job of identifying mental health issues among our youth, and by ensuring that more young Americans have access to mental health treatment.**

- **I am encouraged by the inclusion of these pieces in the President’s proposal. I believe this underscores the growing understanding of how important early evidence-based solutions are to preventing acts of violence. Now is the time to capitalize on this momentum and make these critical investments.**

Conclusion:

- **Eliminating youth violence in this country is a massive undertaking that will require a broad range of solutions. As we move forward together to tackle this issue, we should begin by focusing our efforts on what we know—through research—to be effective.**