



Reducing Youth Violence and Justice Involvement Depends on Increasing Opportunities for Education, Jobs

Remarks by Tracy Velázquez, Executive Director, the Justice Policy Institute

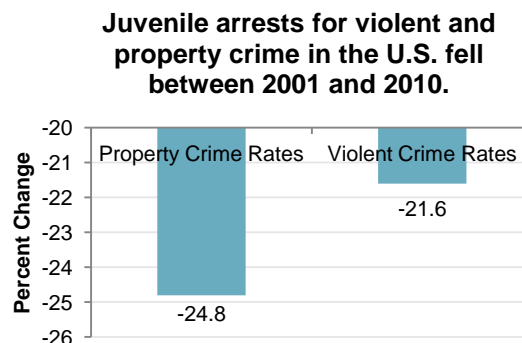
At the Briefing, “**Cost Effectiveness of Youth Violence and Intervention Strategies,**” co-hosted by Congressmen Robert C. “Bobby” Scott and Walter B. Jones

Monday, February 27, 2012, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM
U.S. House of Representatives, Rayburn Office Building Room 2237

Good afternoon. I am honored to be a part of such a distinguished panel to talk about improving outcomes for our nation’s youth. The Justice Policy Institute believes that a key to improved justice outcomes for the country is improving life outcomes for those who have been most impacted by the juvenile and adult justice systems. In particular, by providing youth with the building blocks for success, we can not only keep youth out of the justice system and reduce youth violence, we can also build a stronger economy and healthier communities.

At the top of this list is education. While no single strategy will guarantee reductions in delinquent behavior, criminal activity, or crime rates, increased investments in quality education can have a positive public safety benefit, at significantly lower cost than the justice system.

- Over the past ten years, arrests of youth have dropped dramatically – by about a fourth in terms of property crimes, and over 21 percent when it comes to arrests for violent crime. While there are many factors that have contributed to this, increases in educational attainment are a factor. From 2000 to 2009, the number of people with a high school degree has increased by about 5 percent, while those with a bachelor’s has increased 3 ½ percent
- States whose populations have higher levels of educational attainment also have crime rates lower than the national average.¹
- States with more investments in higher education have better public safety outcomes. According to a JPI analysis, of the 10 states that saw the biggest increases in higher education expenditure, eight saw violent crime rates decline and five saw violent crime decline more than the national average. Of the 10 states that saw the



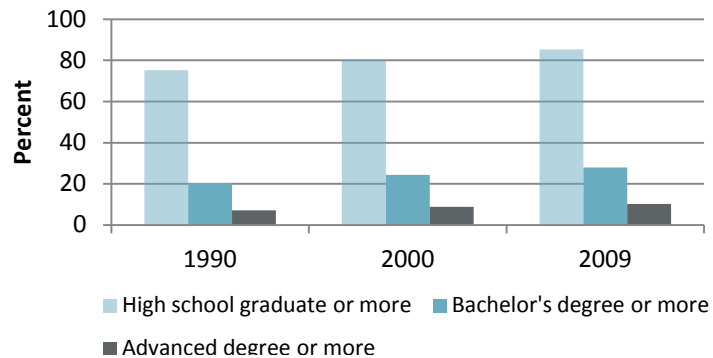
Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report, Crime in the United States, www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm

smallest change in higher education expenditure, the violent crime rate rose in five states.²

- A study reported in the *American Economic Review* on the effects of education on crime found that a one year increase in the average years of schooling completed reduces violent crime by almost 30 percent, motor vehicle theft by 20 percent, arson by 13 percent and burglary and larceny by about 6 percent.³

- Completing high school helps set youth on a positive path towards adulthood. According to research conducted by the American Sociological Association, life course transitions such as finishing high school make people feel part of the social mainstream. They develop community ties through pro-social networks and employment, which in turn act as an informal source of social control, moderating behavior and creating aversion to crime.⁴
- Education increases patience and cultivates an aversion to risk-taking. This may in part be due to the heightened social bonds and responsibilities, as well as an increased awareness of opportunities that might potentially be damaged by a criminal conviction.⁵

Educational attainment in the U.S. has been rising



Source: http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/education/educational_attainment.html

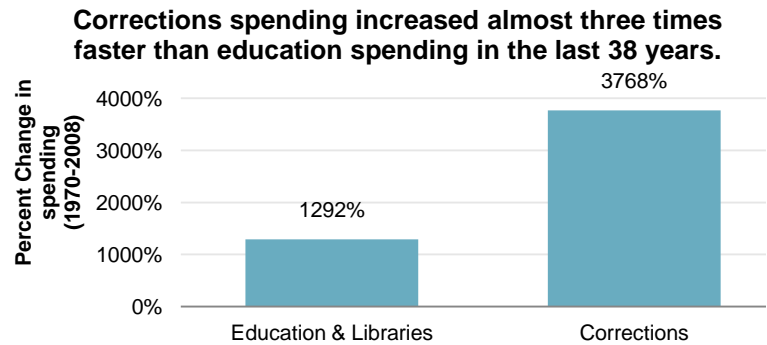
Justice system involvement is not only concentrated among communities of color, but also among people with less education.⁶ One in 10 young, white high school drop outs (age 22-30) were in prison or jail in 1999. Among white men in their early thirties (age 30-34), 13 percent of high school drop outs had prison records by 1999. An astonishing 52 percent of African American male high school dropouts had prison records by their early thirties (age 30-34). Although African American men are more likely to go to prison than white men, increasing educational attainment for both groups is likely to reduce the chances that a person will go to prison.⁷

Despite evidence that investing in education and other positive social institutions can improve public safety and save money, policymakers continue to invest in incarceration.⁸ Over the past 38 years, corrections spending nationally has increased three times faster than state spending on education.⁹ Educational investments increase access to employment and desired job markets and helps to create positive social bonds and investments in communities, which can create an environment where public safety and community well being are better realized.¹⁰

The focus on improving education should include the entire continuum as well. Receiving high-quality early childhood education has been linked to better educational, social and behavioral outcomes over a person's lifetime.¹¹

Numerous studies have also shown that early childhood education can reduce the chances of future justice system involvement. For example:

- **The HighScope Perry Preschool Study** examined the lives of 123 African Americans born from 1962-1967 into poverty and at high risk of failing in school. The majority of those who received the preschool program had higher wages, were more likely to hold a job, committed fewer crimes and were more likely to have graduated from high school than those who did not attend preschool.¹²



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "Digest of Education Statistics, Table 30," August 2010.

- **In a study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers**, a federally-funded program providing educational and family support services to economically disadvantaged youth in Chicago, researchers found that youth who received preschool intervention services had higher rates of high school graduation, more years of education completed and lower rates of juvenile arrests, violent arrests and school dropout than those who did not receive the preschool educational services.¹³

We know that when youth stay in school they are more likely to graduate and less likely to become involved in the justice system. Therefore, it is critical that truancy, suspensions and expulsions be reduced.

Regarding truancy, a variety of family, school, economic and individual student factors can lead to youth not attending school.¹⁴ Truancy reduction programs that encourage consistent attendance by addressing these factors can also improve academic achievement and reduce delinquency.¹⁵

However, funneling truant youth into the juvenile justice system is not only expensive, but it is counterproductive as well. The threat of sanctions, sanctions themselves and placing youth in detention have not been shown to reduce truancy.¹⁶ In Washington State, students receiving a court petition for truancy were more likely to have higher dropout rates, lower on-time graduation rates, lower rates of graduation and more justice system involvement than those whose truancy was handled outside the courts.¹⁷ Punishing truant students with out-of-school suspensions or juvenile detention placements only decreases school engagement and makes it more difficult for students to succeed when they return.¹⁸

Successful truancy intervention programs target risk and protective factors at the individual, family, school and community levels.¹⁹ Two examples of such projects are the **Truancy Intervention Project (TIP)**, a Georgia-based program focused on early intervention, mentoring, community involvement and using role models to combat truancy;²⁰ and the **Truancy Assessment and Service Center (TASC)**, a Louisiana-based program that uses personalized and targeted interventions and easily accessible resources focused on K-5 children. TASC acts as a referral network, linking families to resources within the community that address areas of risk within the family, including providing an in-home therapist to address any concerns.²¹

It's also important to consider that school sanctions such as suspension and expulsion and the expansion of policing in schools can have a detrimental impact on a child's education and increase the likelihood of future justice system involvement. Students that miss school also miss out on developing strong ties to adults and institutions that promote pro-social development and positive life outcomes.²² Suspensions and expulsions on their own increase the chances that a student will be involved in the justice system in the future.²³ Additionally, school suspensions can create a sense of alienation from school²⁴ and can be linked to an increased likelihood of dropping out of school.

Investing in education includes working to find programs and policies that reduce the use of suspensions and expulsions and keep youth in classrooms and actively engaged in the learning process. Denver, Colorado, for instance, implemented a graduated system of responses to student behavior in which out of school suspensions and expulsions are a last resort. The result is not only a reduction in suspensions and expulsions, but also overall improvement in student behavior and satisfaction with the discipline process.²⁵

Unfortunately, school atmosphere is also affected by an excessive presence of police on many campuses. Student-reported incidents of violence and theft are at the lowest levels since 1993, having decreased 69 percent from 155 in 1993 to a rate of 47 in 2008.²⁶ Yet, the number of school resource officers – SRO's – increased 38 percent between 1997 and 2007.²⁷ As tragic as today's school shooting in Ohio is, there is little evidence that police in schools make kids safer. However, when police are in schools, many behavioral incidents that had been previously handled by school officials are now resulting in more arrests and more kids being sanctioned through the justice system.

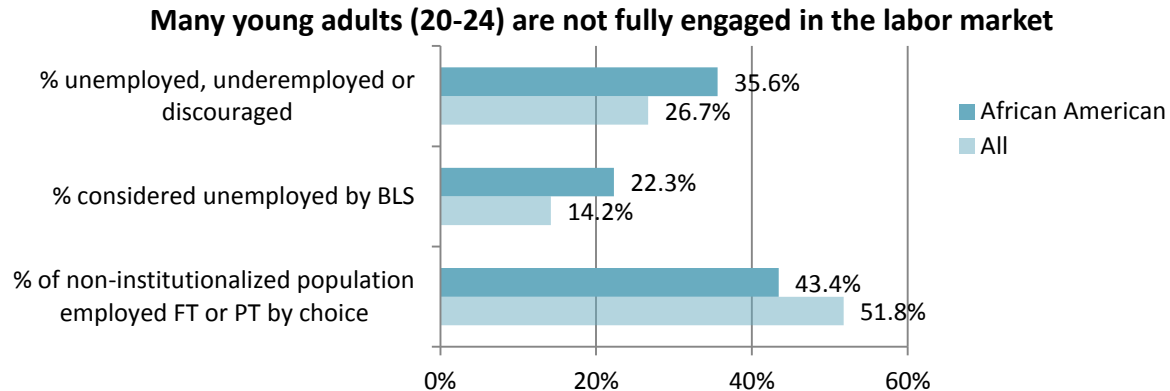
- SROs in schools has lead to an increase in student referrals to the justice system including youth being arrested for disruptive rather than dangerous behavior, like swearing.²⁸
- Referrals to the juvenile justice system disrupt the educational process and can set youth on a track to drop out of school and put them at greater risk of becoming involved in the justice system later on, all at tremendous costs for taxpayers as well the youth themselves and their communities.
- We know that youth who spend time in a correctional facility are more likely to drop out of school. Research has shown that within a year of re-enrolling after spending time confined in a correctional facility, two-thirds to three-fourths of formerly incarcerated youth withdraw or drop out of school.²⁹
- Even contact with the court increases the chances that a high school student will drop out.³⁰

What are the economic benefits of keeping youth in school? According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, the U.S. is currently on a path for 13 million students will drop out of school during the next decade at a cost to the nation of more than \$3 trillion to the economy in lost wages, not to mention other social costs associated with unemployment and low wages.³¹

Finally, I didn't want to leave without at least mentioning another critical precursor to success for young people: employment.

At the end of last summer, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the employment rate for all youth--the proportion of the population 16 to 24 years old working or looking for work--was 59.5 percent in July, the lowest July rate on record. The July 2011 rate was down by 1.0 percentage point from July 2010 and was 18 percent below the peak for that month in 1989 (77.5 percent).³² And in terms of year-round employment, when you add together those who are unemployed, those who are

discouraged and have stopped looking, and those who are under-employed – that is, those who want to work full-time but can only find part-time work, over a fourth of young adults ages 20-24 are not fully engaged in the labor market. Over a third of young adult African Americans are unemployed, underemployed or discouraged.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Online Data. January 2012; Census bureau population estimates

Having a job is a “protective factor” against potential delinquency among youth, even among those previously involved in such negative behavior.³³ Employment has been associated with “significantly reduced crime” in adolescents and young adults aged 17 to 25 years old³⁴ Evidence shows that employed youth are involved in fewer violence- and drug-related arrests³⁵ and property crimes³⁶. Another indicator of the effectiveness of employment as a public safety solution is the fact that areas with lower unemployment rates have lower crime rates. Here in Washington DC, for example, an increase in youth employment was seen to decrease referrals to the juvenile justice system in 2006³⁷.

It is critical, as we continue to look at how to get Americans back to work, that a sharp focus be on youth employment. Not only are both jobs and education critical to reducing youth crime, they are a vital component of ensuring our country’s economic future. Thank you.

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www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/07-08_REP_EducationAndPublicSafety_PS-AC.pdf

² Justice Policy Institute, Education and Public Safety, 2007.

³ Serious violent crime includes murder and aggravated assault. Lochner, Lance and Enrico Moretti. 2004. The effect of education on crime: Evidence from prison inmates, arrests, and self-reports.” *American Economic Review* 94(1).

⁴ Pettit, Becky and Bruce Western. 2004. Mass imprisonment and the life course: Race and class inequality in U.S. incarceration. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 69(2). pp. 153-4.

⁵ Lochner, Lance and Enrico Moretti, 2004.

⁶ Bruce Western, Vincent Schiraldi, and Jason Ziedenberg, *Education and Incarceration* (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2003). www.justicepolicy.org

⁷ Bruce Western, Vincent Schiraldi, and Jason Ziedenberg, 2003.

⁸ Nastassia Walsh, Amanda Petteruti, and Ava Page, *Education and Public Safety* (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2007).

⁹ National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, Table 30: Amount and percentage distribution of direct general expenditures of state and local governments, by function: Selected years, 1970-71 through 2007-08*, August 2010.

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¹⁰ Lochner, Lance and Enrico Moretti, 2004.

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