

# Crime can be curbed with youth programs, advocates say

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those surgeries to repair the damage.

"I can't stand by silently and watch while Congress keeps ignoring those programs, and endangering more and more American lives."

Halbert served as vice-chair of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice from 1993-97, the first crime victim to serve on the board. She is the 1997 recipient of the Crime Victims' Service Award from the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Victims of Crime.

Joining Gilchrist as a member of the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids group is Charlotte Police Chief Dennis Nowicki. The organization is made up of police, prosecutors and crime survivors.

The organization said examples of Congress is failing is Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch's bill, which authorizes \$600 million in new spending, but earmarks none of the money for prevention, while eliminating nearly \$60 million per year in existing prevention funding.

The U.S. House bill passed in May provides no funding for prevention, but forbids states from using any of its \$500 million in annual block grants for prevention programs.

"These bills, with their wait-for-the-crime approach, shortchange both the effective programs proven to prevent crime by helping kids get the right start so they never become criminals, and the intensive help that can steer kids back on track when they first

begin to get into trouble," said Jean Lewis, president of the National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children.

Said Gordon Rondeau, of Marietta, Ga., father of a murdered daughter, "The two addicts who murdered my daughter will be spending the rest of their lives in prison, but that won't bring Renee back.

"Had our nation done more to get them off to a good start, Renee would probably be alive today," Rondeau said. "Politicians who focus only on punishment are cheating Americans out of the solutions that could have prevented Renee's death and so many others.

Rondeau, whose daughter was strangled in Chicago in 1994, is co-founder of Action America: Murder Must End Now.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids pushes preventative actions such as fully funded Head Start and Early Head Start, health care for kids, parenting-education house calls for at-risk parents, public schools and after-school and recreational programs.

"Those are our most powerful weapons against crime - and the ones that can most effectively stop crime before people get hurt."

The organization has cited a Child Welfare League of America study which reported that children who are abused and neglected are 67 times more likely to be arrested between the ages of 9 and 12 than other children. The CWLA called the results a "smoking gun connection" between child abuse and neglect and later

delinquent behavior.

"Adult prisons are filled with victims of child abuse and neglect," said Michael Petit, CWLA deputy director. "The child abuse connection is chillingly obvious in the case of death row inmates. If we help abused and neglected youngsters whose lives contain certain risk predictors - an incarcerated parent, serious mental health problems, substance abuse in the home, early trouble in school and inadequate housing - we can save kids, reduce or prevent later crime and avoid spending millions or perhaps billions in judicial, prison and other costs. With early intervention and support it is absolutely possible to prevent violence."

Other findings cited by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids president Sanford Newman include:

- A High/Scope Foundation study in Michigan which showed

at-risk toddlers denied a program of quality child care and a home visit by a parenting coach were five times more likely to be chronic offenders by age 27 than those provided these services.

- A Syracuse University study showed that providing quality early-childhood programs to families until children reached age 5 cut those kids' risk of being delinquent as teenagers by 90 percent.

- Utah and South Carolina studies showing that family-based therapy for first-time offenders cut in half not only their chances of recidivism, but also the risk that their siblings would become delinquent.

Said former U.S. Attorney General Elliott Richardson, who held four cabinet posts under two Republican presidents, "Ignoring prevention investments leaves us stuck on a treadmill, running faster and faster to put people in

jail while kids are turned into criminals faster than we can lock them up. No strategy of fighting crime on the 'back end' with prisons and police is complete without the 'front end' investments that we know can help kids and keep Americans safe."

## Budget battle looms

By Beverly Earle  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

It's the budget, folks. Final passage of the two-year budget tops the General Assembly's agenda. While the Senate and House approve separate spending plans, the budget is not complete until negotiators from the two chambers sit down and resolve hundreds of differences between the two sides. We are in the negotiating mode now.

The Senate and House alternate legislative sessions presenting the initial budget. The budget for the 1997-99 session was presented by the Senate. Departments of state government submit their current budget, their needs and their "wish list" to the Budget Office. These requests are incorporated in the governor's list. This package comes to the General Assembly at the beginning of the long session as the Governor's Budget. This Budget usually serves as a guide for the direction of the final budget. Seven appropriation subcommittees meet for months to determine what if any changes will be made to existing departmental allocations. During this same time, members are introducing appropriation bills. At some point early in this process, the amount of money to be available in the General Fund is estimated.

On April 23, Senate Bill 352 Current Operations-Capital Budget passed the Senate and was sent to the House. This bill contained \$11.4 billion in spending. Shortly after the Senate submitted their budget bill, the Treasury Dept. identified a surplus of \$219.3 million for this year. Of this surplus, \$75 million is recurring money.

Thursday, June 5, the House passed its version of the budget. The House committee substitute with significant differences, went back to the Senate for concurrence. Of course, that did not happen. A conference committee was appointed to work out the differences. Easier said than done. As of this date, no progress. The two groups have not agreed on the bottom line figure.

### Good, bad and worse

Education was a priority with the governor, Senate and

House. Overall, more than half the state budget goes for education: the public schools, uni-



Earle

versity system and community colleges. Almost 40 cents out of every dollar in the proposed budget will go into the public schools. Included is \$181 million for teacher pay raises ranging from 4 to 9 percent. This begins finding for the Excellent Schools Act, which would bring teachers to the national average salary by the year 2000. The budget also contains \$21 million to expand Smart Start to all 100 counties. This is the governor's program aimed at preschool children. A 6 percent raise for principals is in the House version, as opposed to 3 percent in the senate. The House budget includes a 1 cent food tax cut.

Many other areas did not fare as well. The House would provide state employees with a 4 percent increase, while the Senate proposes 3 percent. The House would reduce state contributions to pension funds to finance the majority of this 1 percent increase. A large number of human services programs that impact the family, children, and the elderly were cut or did not receive adequate funding.

Both bodies supported a provision that would give an extra \$21 million to five predominantly white institutions in the University of North Carolina system. The money was allocated after a Board of Governors study concluded that the white non-research schools were underfunded. This conclusion astounded the black legislators who know first hand how historically black colleges and universities have been denied their fair share of the UNC system appropriations.

More and more often we are seeing special provisions in the budget bill that should not be there. This bill is stuffed full of displaced personal agendas. This is a means of getting legislation passed that might otherwise not move or have a difficult time. One such agenda is the House Welfare Reform Bill.

**BEVERLY EARLE, a Charlotte Democrat, is a member of the N.C. House of Representatives.**

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