

COMMONWEAL

P.O. BOX 316, BOLINAS, CA 94924 _ (415) 388-6666 _ www.commonweal.org _ MARCH
2005

YOUTH VIOLENCE IN CALIFORNIA: ARE WE ABOUT TO JEOPARDIZE A TWELVE YEAR SAFETY RECORD?

Consider these headlines:

- ❖ **GUNS BECOME THE NUMBER ONE KILLER OF KIDS IN CALIFORNIA**
- ❖ **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS SURGE IN VIOLENT YOUTH CRIME**
- ❖ **STATE YOUTH PRISONS PLAN MAJOR EXPANSION**

Those were headlines in 1992. They could become headlines again, if policymakers make the wrong choices now about critical violence prevention policies and programs.

Twelve years ago, The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF) viewed escalating rates of violence in California as a public health crisis. In response, TCWF launched its Violence Prevention Initiative, which funded a statewide campaign involving health professionals, policy experts, community organizations, researchers and others.

The campaign led to impressive results. Law enforcement leaders, state policymakers and local officials established after-school and other violence prevention programs. New laws were passed in California, controlling the proliferation of firearms and reducing children's access to guns.

As a result, Californians now enjoy historic levels of community safety. Violent youth crime has declined dramatically. Child gun injuries and deaths have been cut in half. Youth incarceration rates have been reduced. Compared to 1992, Californians live in a much safer domestic world.

Today, a key question for policymakers is: *In a poor budget environment, what programs and policies must be sustained, in order to preserve this remarkable record of public safety in California?*

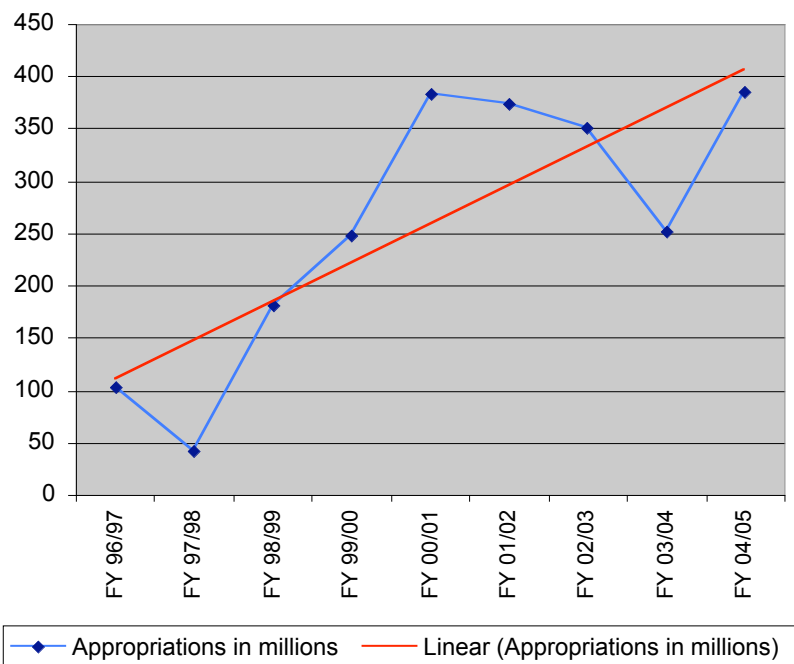
This report documents some major California trends in youth violence reduction over the last decade. It highlights key programs, policies and budget decisions that have helped to build safer and healthier communities. It describes some of the hard choices that policymakers will need to make about these programs, policies and expenditures in the months and years ahead.

This report is published by Commonweal, a non-profit organization with headquarters at Bolinas, California. The development and publication of this report was funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation. Additional information on California youth crime and violence prevention programs and policies can be found on the Commonweal website at www.commonweal.org using the link to the Juvenile Justice Program.

CALIFORNIA'S INVESTMENT IN YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION: MORE SPENDING FOR PREVENTION, LESS VIOLENCE

Starting in 1996, TCWF began tracking the level of California state general funds appropriated for youth violence prevention programs at the state and local levels. The results, compiled by Commonweal, are shown below. Programs tracked include those having a specific focus on the prevention of youth violence, in the education, justice, corrections, health and social welfare sectors of the state budget. The tracking results show that state general fund spending for these programs rose from a low of \$42 million in FY 97/98 to a recent high of \$ 385 million for FY 04/05—a nine-fold increase.¹ This increase corresponds with declines in youth violence, described below.

**CA Youth Crime & Violence Prevention Programs
State General Funds (\$millions) FY96/97-FY04/05**



For the last five budget cycles, three major revenue streams have comprised the lion's share of these state investments in youth violence prevention: the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act of 2000 ("CPA"), the After School Education and Safety Act (Proposition 49 and prior legislation), and the School Safety and Violence Prevention grant programs.

After-school spending in California is "locked in" to minimum spending levels by Proposition 49, the statewide initiative sponsored by Arnold Schwarzenegger shortly before he became Governor. For FY 05/06, the Governor has proposed \$121.5 million in state general funds for after school programs—the same as last year. School safety funding in California has remained fairly stable over the last five years (averaging around \$100 million per year), even though the FY 03/04 appropriation was "deferred" to a later fiscal year. For FY 05/06, the Governor proposes total funding for school safety programs at a level of about \$107 million.²

The Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act: should it be dismantled? The other major youth violence prevention revenue stream-- the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act— was slashed by the Governor in his January Budget Proposal. The Governor wants to cut CPA funding by 75% (to \$ 25 million statewide from \$100 million). This cut, if accepted by lawmakers, would effectively eliminate

a safety net of local crime prevention and supervision programs now provided to children and teens throughout California. These include youth mental health, gang outreach, drug treatment, and probation supervision programs—as well as specialized programs for girls in the justice system. CPA funds are, in many counties, the sole means of support for community-based agencies that work directly, and effectively, with at-risk or arrested youth. Lawmakers may well question whether the dismantling of the Crime Prevention Act, and the resulting removal of the youth safety net, is an appropriate deficit-reduction strategy. In order to dismantle the CPA, lawmakers must also break the legislative formula that links these crime prevention funds, dollar-for-dollar, to COPS grants to local law enforcement agencies. In the past, sheriffs and police chiefs have voiced strong support for the CPA and for the concept of dollar-for-dollar investment in both crime prevention and law enforcement. Fiscal options to crippling the CPA—such as spreading smaller cuts through related funding streams—will be examined by lawmakers and stakeholders in the months ahead.³

Public support for youth violence prevention programs remains strong. TCWF has commissioned public opinion surveys on youth violence for more than a decade. These surveys, conducted by respected polling firms, reveal high levels of voter support for the state’s investment in youth violence prevention programs. One consistent finding is that voters favor spending for violence prevention programs over spending for youth incarceration by a three-to-one margin. California voters also endorse specific health-based approaches to violence prevention, such as after school programs and programs in the areas of gang intervention, conflict resolution, youth job development, substance abuse prevention and mental health. When asked in 2004 whether they thought the Legislature and the Governor should continue to fund youth safety programs, even when faced with a multi-billion dollar deficit, 74 percent of registered voters said that youth safety programs should continue to be funded.

From: Survey of California Voters on Youth Violence and Safety, April 2004
 (Survey and Policy Research Institute, San Jose State University, 815 voters)¹

Question: California is facing a budget crisis with an ongoing deficit estimated at \$5- \$7 billion. The Governor and the Legislature have already made deep cuts in schools, health services, public safety and transportation. Should they.....

Choice	Number	Percent
...Reduce funding for youth safety programs?	92	11%
...Continue to fund youth safety programs?	599	74%
Don't know	124	15%

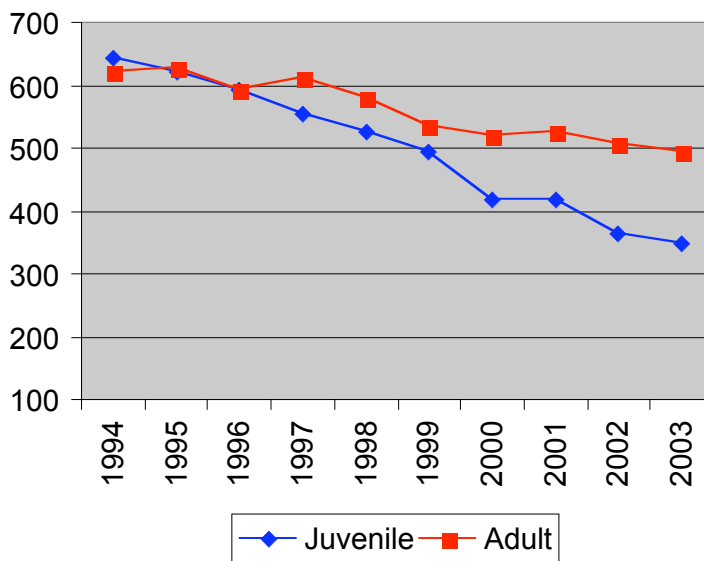
MEASURES OF YOUTH VIOLENCE REDUCTION IN CALIFORNIA

Trends in youth violence can be measured with available data from statewide health, education and criminal justice agencies. Two of the most significant trends are documented below.

Arrests of youth for violent crimes are dramatically lower over the last 10 years

According to the California Department of Justice, between 1994 and 2003, arrests of juveniles for crimes of violence declined by 30%. Adjusted for the rise in the youth population during this period, the decline is even more dramatic—a drop of nearly 50% in the rate (per 100,000 youth age 10-17) of violent juvenile arrests. Juveniles have done better than adults, when it comes to lower rates of violence. The comparison is shown below.⁴

**California Arrests for Violent Crimes
Rates Per 100,000- Juvenile and Adult
1994-2003**



For the most violent crime-- homicide—the drop in juvenile arrests is even more astonishing. Between 1994 and 2003, while the state's at-risk youth population (age 10-17) grew from 3 to 4 million, arrests of juveniles for homicide declined by 69%-- from 542 such arrests in 1994 to 167 in 2003.

Criminal justice experts attribute these reductions in youth violence several factors—but one factor that is impossible to ignore is the growth (over this same period) of youth crime and violence prevention programs, supported by state funds, as described above. Other factors cited by experts include new law enforcement strategies (such as more community policing); improved evaluation and efficacy of crime prevention programs; changes in sentencing policies (less incarceration for non-violent offenses, longer incarceration for violent crimes); and improvements in the economy.

Does this trend signal an opportunity to shift corrections dollars to prevention? This reduction in violent youth crime has produced a collateral benefit in California— a smaller youth prison population and the related opportunity to lower state corrections costs. With fewer youth committing violent offenses, the population of the California Youth Authority has decreased by two-thirds— from a high of 10,000 youth-inmates in 1996 to fewer than 4,000 today. This presents policymakers with the opportunity to re-direct incarceration dollars into programs for crime prevention and youth rehabilitation. In general, policymakers have yet to capitalize on this opportunity. For FY 04/05, California's general fund investment in youth violence prevention (about \$385 million) was still only a fraction of the massive state budget for adult and youth corrections (more than \$6 billion).

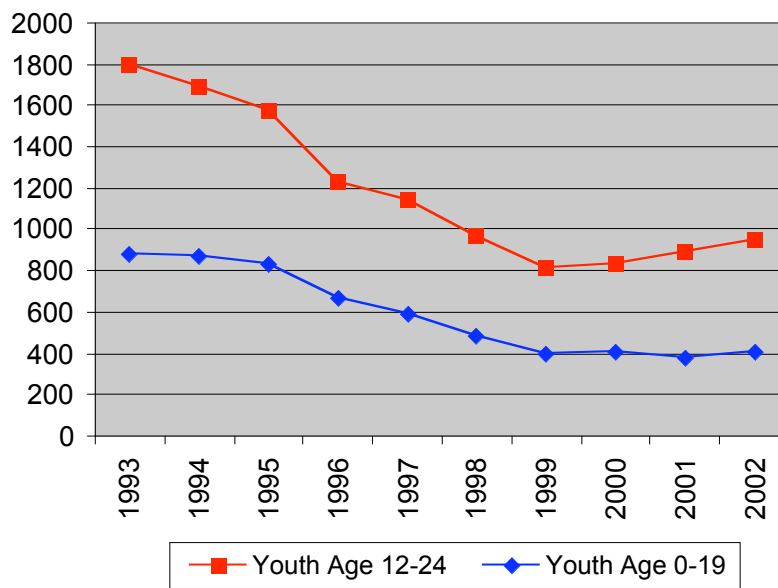
Child gun injuries and deaths have been cut in half over the last decade

Another measure of youth safety is the number of children who suffer injury or death each year from firearms. In 1992, guns were the leading cause of accidental or violent death for California children, exceeding even motor vehicle deaths. Between 1993 and 1995, more than 800 children aged 0-19 died each year in California from gunshots. About one-quarter of these deaths were suicidal or accidental, but three-fourths were homicidal in origin. For every child killed by a gun in these years, another three children were hospitalized with gunshot injuries. For older kids, the gun death data were even more chilling. In 1993, nearly 1,800 young people between the ages of 12 and 24 died from bullets fired in California.⁵

Faced with this grim picture, TCWF funded a public education campaign to focus citizen and policymaker attention on California firearm policies. This campaign, and tragedies like the 1993 gun massacre at a San Francisco law firm, spurred lawmakers to enact more stringent firearm control policies. California has now become one of the toughest gun-law states in the nation. A statewide ban on the manufacture and sale of cheap handguns (“junk guns”), finally adopted in 1998, started as a wave of local campaigns that led more than 40 California cities to outlaw junk guns in their own jurisdictions. Other California reforms included new laws toughening the ban on assault weapons, raising the legal age for minors to own guns, increasing penalties for failing to secure guns from children, requiring child safety locks on guns sold by dealers, tightening firearm transfer and background check laws, and banning .50 caliber “sniper” rifles. These statutory reforms have survived the various court challenges brought to date by gun manufacturing and gun owner groups.

As California gun policies became more restrictive, childhood gun injuries and deaths began to decline. Between 1993 and 2002, gun deaths of children between the ages of birth and 19 dropped by more than 50 percent—from 883 deaths in 1993 to 405 deaths in 2002. Similar declines occurred in older age groups—for example, for youth aged 12-24, gun deaths in California dropped from 1,798 in 1993 to 947 in 2002—a decline of nearly 50%. Hospitalizations of children for gunshot wounds were also steeply reduced in this period.

**California Gun Deaths for Youth in
Two Age Groups - Yearly 1993-2002**



While these declines are welcome news, the work is far from finished. It remains intolerable that in 2002, nearly 1,000 young people (aged 12-24) in California lost their lives to gunfire. Strong political forces still seek to unravel gun safety laws passed over the last decade—as evidenced by the year 2004 expiration of the federal assault weapons ban. Though he signed the .50 caliber rifle ban last year, Governor Schwarzenegger also vetoed bills to prohibit ammunition sales to minors and to require gun safety education in schools. California policymakers need to remain firm in their commitment to gun safety—not only by preserving laws already passed, but also by looking ahead. The child safety measures vetoed by the Governor last year deserve another look. In addition, it is time for California lawmakers to consider new proposals to strengthen transfer requirements for long guns (to track ownership changes) and to implement a ballistics ID system that can help law enforcement trace firearms used in crimes.

Even with the substantial decline in child gun deaths, in 2002 nearly 1000 young Californians between the ages of 12-24 lost their lives to gunfire...

THE BUDGET CHALLENGE OF PRESERVING CALIFORNIA'S SAFETY RECORD

California policymakers will be called upon to make difficult budget choices in the months ahead. On the one hand, revenue shortfalls and state deficits will force new controls on spending. On the other hand, caution must be exercised, and smart choices must be made, to sustain the critical policies and programs that have produced a new era of community safety in California. It is simply too dangerous to go backwards now.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION about youth violence prevention programs and policies in California, contact David Steinhart, Director of the Commonweal Juvenile Justice Program, at (415) 388-6666. For further information about The California Wellness Foundation's violence prevention program, contact Nicole Jones, TCWF Program Director at (818) 593-6600.

¹ Sources for annual appropriations figures include California state budgets (FY 96/97 through FY 04/05), other state appropriations bills, the state Department of Finance and individual state agencies and departments. The dip in FY 03/04 was due to the technical "deferral" of school safety funds to the next fiscal year. The straight line in the chart shows the linear spending trend over all reported fiscal years. These figures are for state general fund spending only; additional funding for youth violence prevention programs in California comes from federal sources.

² FY 05/06 proposed general fund spending levels are from the Governor's January Budget Proposal issued 1/10/05.

³ Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act (AB 1913, Stats. of 2000, Chapter 353). The Governor has proposed to maintain formula-linked "COPS" funding for local law enforcement at \$100 million for FY 05/06. The fate of CPA funding for FY 05/06 is linked, not only to the COPS funding stream, but also to another state-local revenue stream—TANF probation funds (about \$200 million statewide) supporting county juvenile justice operations. One option for lawmakers would be to spread cuts among these various programs—maintaining the integrity of each—as opposed to the essential dismantling of one of them (the CPA). A county-by-county review of CPA programs, and a recent evaluation of the CPA, are available on the website of the state Board of Corrections at www.bdcorr.ca.gov.

⁴ Crime data, including the data reflected in the chart, are from the California Department of Justice (Attorney General's Office), Criminal Justice Statistics Division, "Criminal Justice Profiles" (statewide California) for the years 1994 through 2003 (latest year available). Additional data may be accessed on the Attorney General's website at www.ag.ca.gov

⁵ All youth firearm injury and death data in this report are from the California Department of Health Services, Epidemiology and Injury Prevention Control (EPIC) Branch, for the years 1993 through 2002 (latest year available). Additional data may be accessed on the EPIC website at www.dhs.ca.gov.