

YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CONGRESSIONAL FORUM

Statement by Hennepin County Commissioner Mark Stenglein.

Congressman Ellison, members of Congress, Mayor Rybak, thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am Commissioner Mark Stenglein, Vice-Chair of the Hennepin County Board. Hennepin is the largest county in the state, home to approximately one-quarter of Minnesota's population and a third of the jobs. I represent District 2, which includes North and Northeast Minneapolis. I am here today to request the *Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence* be incorporated into federal legislation.

Violence is not isolated to those living in my district on the North side. It impacts all of us. Taxpayers from all over Hennepin County are bearing the brunt of youth violence. Our 2009 Community Corrections and Rehabilitation budget for juveniles is more than \$57 million. This does not include costs incurred by the County Attorney, Public Defender, District Court, Sheriff's office, or local police departments.

Youth violence is a public health issue, not just a criminal justice issue. We can not arrest and detain our way out of the problem. The federal government needs to partner with local governments and provide more funding for programs on the front end - programs that help prevent kids from entering a life of crime. Prevention is the most constructive way to build safe communities. If we can help prevent youth violence and juvenile delinquency and keep kids feeling safe and in school, they have a better chance of staying out of the criminal justice system and becoming productive, taxpaying adults.

Hennepin County has taken broad steps to decrease violence and reduce recidivism in young people. We partner with many other agencies to intervene early. Every time juveniles come in contact with the criminal justice system: at the Hennepin County / Minneapolis collaborative Juvenile Supervision Center, the Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center, or the Hennepin County Home School, they are screened to determine what services are needed to help turn their lives around. The goal is to improve the

youths' overall well-being to keep them out of the criminal justice system and reduce recidivism.

Hennepin County is using evidence based programs that have been shown to reduce recidivism. Many of these programs are community based. We do not want to detain every kid. It is not cost effective and research has shown that detention is not always a deterrent nor the best way to reduce recidivism. Detention should only be for kids who are a risk to public safety or fleeing.

In 2007, it cost \$10 million to detain 4,000 juveniles at the Juvenile Detention Center. Many of those kids were detained because they missed a court appearance - not because they were violent or serious offenders. One initiative we have adopted is reminder calls, like your dentist does. This small effort has increased the likelihood of these kids showing up for their court appearance from 50% to 71% - thus keeping them out of detention.

Many of the juveniles that are detained or sent to the County Home School or another out-of home placement facility have serious mental health issues, significant behavioral problems, chemical dependency, and significant challenges at home. 76% of those receiving treatment at the Home School are diagnosed with one or more mental-health disorders. Juveniles receive educational training and intense mental health, behavioral and drug treatment at both the Detention Center and County Home School. Including the goals outlined in the *Blueprint* will help us provide the comprehensive treatment needed to help them overcome their problems, take responsibility for their actions, and give them an opportunity to be contributing members of society.

Hennepin County has formed new partnerships to provide transitional services and aftercare that includes the family and helps reintegrate the juvenile offender back into the community successfully. These juveniles need jobs. We are working with our partners to provide family based therapy and job skills training to improve job placement for these kids. Resources are scarce and additional federal funding will ensure these programs are

not cut so we can continue to do our best to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety.

Hennepin County works to put up barriers to prevent kids from entering the criminal justice system. We seek to restore our youth who have started down the wrong path. We strive to use best practices effectively and efficiently. Incorporating the *Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence* into federal legislation will help us balance strong law enforcement with effective prevention programs. It will provide the youth of my district, and all of Hennepin County, with more opportunities so they can make the right decisions and succeed.

Thank you for your time.