

Cities Can't Be Sure That Enforcement Cuts Crime, Though Experience Shows It Raises Other Issues

By CINDY LOOSE
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When the Supreme Court in 1993 refused to hear a constitutional challenge to Dallas's curfew law for youth, hundreds of American cities rushed to copy it. Juvenile crime in most of those cities plummeted.

But it also plummeted in most cities that did not impose a curfew.

When Los Angeles began vigorously enforcing its new curfew law, serious juvenile crime dropped 40 percent. But after San Francisco stopped enforcing its curfew, violent juvenile crime there still dropped 41 percent.

Such statistics are the golden nuggets advocates and opponents of curfews pull out for display. But judging the success of curfews requires more than simply choosing which stats to believe. As the District embarks on its own experiment with a youth curfew, experts say that whether the curfew will have any effect depends on a variety of variables: how it is enforced, how well it is coordinated with other innovative police strategies, whether it is used as an opportunity to link violators with social services and whether courts systematically follow through with penalties.

"I think it's a good idea for the District," said New Orleans Police Chief Richard Pennington, formerly an assistant chief in the District. "It will help in those areas around nightclubs and corners with a lot of drinking and narcotics use."

But taking violators to police stations, as the District plans to do when parents can't be immediately notified, "could be a problem," Pennington said.

New Orleans uses its curfew law, which has netted more than 3,000 violators so far this year, as a "gateway to services." Police stop any person under age 17 after 8 p.m. on school nights and 11 p.m. on weekends.

All New Orleans youths who are picked up are delivered to a community center and into the hands of counselors and social workers. The two nonprofit agencies that run the center and provide the counselors already had extensive youth programs and have expanded them with the help of a \$500,000 federal law enforcement grant. The counselors at the center work with schools and other city agencies and charitable groups to come up with an individual plan for each violator and the violator's parents.

"We realized when children are on the streets there are often underlying problems involved," said New Orleans police Lt. Martin Defilippo.

Sometimes the problems are complex, sometimes more easily resolved. A child recently revealed, for example, that he and two of his three siblings had not been going to school because the family had only one of the uniforms required by New Orleans public schools.

"A case manager found them all uniforms and provided them school supplies, and off to school they went," said Veronica Brown, New Orleans youth services manager.

Both crime against juveniles and crime by them have dropped dramatically since the New Orleans curfew was imposed in 1994. City officials said they believe the services are as important as the curfew itself.

District officials considered setting up curfew centers but decided not to. Instead, violators will be taken to precinct stations but not locked up.

"We thought that curfew centers disassociated the officer and the district from the child and his family," said Terrance W. Gainer, the executive assistant police chief. "The officer would simply become a cab service between the street and the center."

Under the city's community policing initiative, the officer should know families on the beat. If there is a serious family problem, Gainer said, "the officer needs to know that and then start employing resources of the city and courts, in conjunction with youth officers."

Police have been given no special training in curfew enforcement, beyond receiving a police directive reviewed at roll call. But Gainer said police officers "are street-corner sociologists. That's the essence of community policing. You don't need too many interactions with people to know they have a problem."

At the Urban Institute's Program on Law and Behavior, however, Jeff Butts argues that it is wise to separate curfew violators from the criminal justice system.

"The worst thing is putting violators through the same funnel as criminals," Butts said. Youths on the edge may start identifying themselves as criminals, then feel obliged to live up to the image, he said.

Curfews, with or without social components, have proven popular with police and elected officials. A U.S. Conference of Mayors survey found that officials in 90 percent of nearly 300 cities with curfews considered them useful and a good use of police resources. More than 80 percent said curfews made their streets safer and curbed gang violence.

But many researchers question whether there is a cause-and-effect relationship. The most comprehensive study concluded that to date such claims "represent little more than unsupported assertions."

Researchers Mike A. Males and Dan Macallair, from the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, studied crime statistics in California cities with and without curfews and found no support for the hypothesis that jurisdictions with curfews experience lower crime levels, accelerated youth crime reduction, or lower rates of juvenile violent death.

Most researchers, Butts said, ascribe any drop in youth crime to a variety of causes.

"There's a top ten list of favorite theories," one of the most popular being "Big Brother," Butts said. A cultural change took place, the theory goes, as younger children watched their siblings and fathers caught up in a spasm of violence in the early 1990s. Seeing them in jail or dead had a profound effect.

Other researchers point to policy successes. Boston, for example, is credited with reducing juvenile crime through effective policing, particularly a crackdown on guns.

Violence rates in a city also can change drastically depending on how well police deal with a relatively small group of problem youths.

"Juvenile violence is always a relatively rare thing," Butts said. "If two dozen kids for whatever reason whip themselves in a frenzy, they can wreak havoc and cause what appears to be a crime wave."

The District's law requires youth under 17 to be off the streets by 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and midnight on weekends. During July and August, the midnight deadline will apply every night.

Like many other cities, the District used the Dallas law as a model. But cities with similar laws enforce them in vastly different ways.

Some pick up every violator who can't show proof of an exemption—for instance, coming from a church or school activity. At the other extreme is Louisville, where police have no authority to take violators into custody.

Officers there simply tell curfew violators to go home. If they don't obey, there is nothing police can do about it. In the District the law also has numerous loopholes, including an exception for those who cite their constitutional rights.

But smoke and mirrors work in Louisville, said Chief Gene Sherrard: Most teenagers don't know the law has no teeth, and they move on. Those who have been in trouble before are more likely to know the law, but they don't want anything to do with the police, so they move on, too.

Civil libertarians worry that the law will disproportionately affect minorities. Others argue that targeting poor neighborhoods—which often are populated by minorities—makes sense. After all, that's where the crime is, said Heather MacDonald, of the Manhattan Institute.

Cities that enforce their curfews only during the summer include Flint, Mich., where the dozen officers assigned to schools become curfew enforcers during summer vacation.

Caterina Gouvis, of the Urban Institute, notes that during the school year, crimes against District juveniles peak at 3:30, just after school, but during the summer, the peak comes at 11 p.m. She suggests it might make more sense to enforce only a summer curfew, if much of the goal—as the District states—is to protect children from crime. However, the District's law starts the summer curfew at midnight—an hour after the peak.

District violators can be sentenced to community service; adults responsible for them can be fined up to \$500 or assigned community service. The youth probation arm of D.C. Superior Court is charged with overseeing any penalties under the curfew law. Some experts are concerned that the District may not have the structure in place to oversee penalties.

"You could see the kind of problem the District has in its drug court, where people on probation are put on more probation—it's just more paperwork, and nothing happens," Gouvis said.

"If behavior is to be changed, the response must be sure and swift."

Crime
Curfews

Chicago Unveils \$1.5 Billion Housing Plan

51 Decaying High-Rise Buildings to Be Razed, Replaced With 24,000 Town House Units

By WILLIAM CLAIBORNE
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CHICAGO, Oct. 1—Virtually all of Chicago's high-rise public housing developments, dreary symbols of decades of failed public housing policy, would be demolished over the next five years under an ambitious, \$1.5 billion plan the Chicago Housing Authority intends to submit to the federal government.

The move comes four months after Mayor Richard M. Daley regained control of the Housing Authority from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which took over the nation's second-largest public housing agency in 1995, citing poor management, questionable financing practices and neglect of its buildings and tenants.

In all, 51 decaying, and often half-occupied, gallery-style high-rise buildings containing 16,000 apartment units would be razed and replaced on existing public housing

sites with more than 24,000 new or rehabilitated units for mixed-income tenants, city housing authority officials said. The new plan would more than double the number of units that have been scheduled for razing.

Housing Authority officials said most of the replacement developments would be rental town house units in mixed-income communities. The agency also plans to spend \$350 million rehabilitating 10,000 units for senior citizens.

Among the high-rises to be torn down are the 32 buildings that make up the crime-plagued and drug-ridden Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens on the city's South Side and the eight buildings of the Cabrini-Green project on the West Side, which also have high vacancy rates and are partially boarded up.

In making its announcements, the Housing Authority said it will diminish its role as principal landlord to the city's poor by privatizing the management of all of its properties by next June. The move would cut the agency's payroll by more than 70 percent, from 2,454 to 700 positions, with 641 employees let go by the end of this year. About 300 workers received their pink slips today.

Housing Authority CEO Phillip Jackson said the authority will spend less of its \$614 million operating budget for next year on "unresponsive . . . bureaucracy" and more on property management by "professional firms" that will treat tenants as customers.

Jackson, who grew up in the Robert Taylor Homes, also announced his intention to end the city's scattered-site housing program, which was designed to shift poor, mostly black tenants from segregated housing developments in concentrated areas to more economically diverse neighborhoods. The city cannot afford to buy more real estate, officials said, and must build on land it owns.

"The old paradigm for public housing has failed," Jackson said. "This plan represents a genuine rethinking and rebirth of public housing for the benefit of those who live there and the taxpayers who have been supporting a failing system."

Jackson, recently appointed by Daley to head the housing authority, predicted the plan would "transform public housing in Chicago" if the city is able to take advantage of a

new law that would allow it to borrow against federal funds to pay for demolition, renovation and construction projects.

Housing Authority Chairman Sharon Gist-Gillian said the authority normally receives \$130 million to \$150 million a year in capital funding from HUD, but that this year it will ask HUD to commit to 10 years of level funding that would allow it to sell \$1.5 billion in grant anticipation bonds that it would use on the project over the next five or six years. She said that would be enough to pay for the 24,000 new or rehabilitated units and meet the federal requirement of assuring that each "lease compliant" tenant will be housed.

"Our plan is clearly a shift in philosophy for Chicago, but it is being driven as much by a shift in thinking at the federal level," Gist-Gillian said in an interview.

"We've learned since the 1950s that these islands where people are stacked and isolated from the surrounding community just don't work," she added.

However, some tenants and public housing advocates today criticized the plan, saying that it would give private developers too much control and lead to less available public housing.

"They're not responding to the need that's out there for affordable housing," said Rich Wheelock, a Legal Assistance Foundation attorney for Cabrini-Green tenants who have filed a lawsuit aimed at forcing the city to increase the amount of land designated for affordable public housing. "The number of displaced families will skyrocket even faster on this plan."

He noted that for years, the Cabrini-Green apartments, which are situated on some of the city's prime real estate on the western edge of the downtown residential and commercial district, have been coveted by real estate developers seeking to build potentially profitable condominiums for higher-income residents.

"They [CHA officials] want to treat the residents as private tenants," Wheelock said. "That loses sight of the fact that these residents have special housing needs, which must be addressed."

Special correspondent Kari Lydersen contributed to this article.