

August 1, 2000

Mr. Richard R. Terzian  
Chairman, Little Hoover Commission  
925 L. Street, Suite 805  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Terzian and Members of the Commission:

I wish to thank the Little Hoover Commission for giving me an opportunity to share my ideas about youth violence prevention strategies. I feel very honored to be asked to participate in this process and I especially look forward to discussing my ideas on August 24<sup>th</sup>.

First and foremost, youth crime prevention programs require active youth participation at the planning stages of the program. Without youth “buy-in” programs may be of limited applicability to the youth, and therefore go largely ignored by the target population. A population, by the way, that represents nearly a third of the entire population of California. Often the best intentions of adults have very little real impact on the problem because the youth have no interest in either the program or the outcome. The Attorney General realized this when he convened his Youth Council on Violence Prevention in 1997/98. This group, which was made up of ten youth and adult partners from throughout the State of California, was able to develop 16 “power plays” for the prevention of youth violence. One of those strategies is entitled, “ Youth Memberships on Government Boards, We want to be Heard!” In looking further at this area, the Youth

Council recommended that Government Code Section 1020 be changed to allow full youth voting membership on government boards. Some jurisdictions have recognized the value of listening to the youth, including the California Board of Education. However, this is an area in which we have just begun to scratch the surface and there is room for much more improvement.

In the Ojai Valley, we have been successful in implementing a number of juvenile crime prevention measures. One of the most successful has been the creation of the Ojai Valley Youth Foundation which has the mandate to ensure the implementation of the programs contained in the Ojai Valley Youth Master Plan. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of developing a Plan, with maximum input from the youth, to help direct a community into the future. Importantly, when developing such a plan, the community is forced to take a good long and honest look at itself. The research that is necessary to come up with appropriate conclusions about the community sheds light on many of the communities ills that many would just as soon ignore. The research makes it difficult to continue in a world of denial about the communities problems.

Well-crafted Master Plans require active participation and “buy-in” from the entire community. Therefore, all segments, from governmental agencies, to business, service clubs, religious organizations and youth serving groups must be allowed input into the process. Through this planning process a plan that truly meets the needs of the youth of the community can be developed.

Youth Master Plans are not documents to be written and then shelved. They are working documents that must be revisited at least once a year to ensure that the suggested strategies are being met. As an example from the Ojai Plan, in the years since its creation, a Youth Employment Service has been started, Diversity Days are now common occurrences and a Skate Park is finally in full swing. In addition, the Ojai Valley Youth Foundation has received a large grant from Wellness Foundation in order to continue to implement the strategies outlined in the Youth Master Plan. It is also interesting to

note that the Board of Directors of the Foundation is made up of youth and adult partners with equal voting rights.

In today's political world, there must be a balance struck between prevention activities and intervention and enforcement activities. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to successfully measure the results of crime and violence prevention strategies. How do you quantify the number of violent acts you have prevented by the implementation of a certain program? It is much easier to relate the absence of crime with arrest statistics, whether or not they are truly related to each other. Therefore, prevention techniques often take "back seat" to more traditional methods of crime suppression. The natural question that comes from this realization is how will crime prevention techniques ever reach the same acceptance among the populace as more traditional methods. My speculation is that this will only be accomplished through years and years of public education, depending, of course, on the commitment by governmental agencies to get this message out.

We do not need to continually re-invent the wheel as it relates to juvenile violence prevention strategies. There are a number of programs that are time-tested and have been proven to work. One of the most successful in California, as well as the United States, is the Police Activities League (PAL). The underlying philosophies of PAL are really very basic. Give kids a safe place to go, hook them up with caring adults, provide positive peer mentoring, and give them something to do, preferably a recreational program, and they will not be on the streets committing crimes. Kids who are busy shooting hoops are not shooting each other!

The California Office of Criminal Justice Planning recently announced the award of \$193,000 a year (for three years) to the Ojai Valley PAL Program. Because of this large grant award, approximately 300 kids who are mainly from single parent households, now have opportunities that they could only previously imagine. While this is a relatively new program in the Valley, we have already seen juvenile crime statistics began to decline during the

hours of operation of PAL. It is a proven program that works which should be supported at all levels of State Government.

In your letter you ask the question about what the state can do to advance an effective statewide prevention strategy. I think in answer to that question, I would encourage your commission to recommend a statewide youth master or action plan. On first blush, this may seem like a huge undertaking. But in reality it is not as daunting a task as you may imagine. Much of the work in this area has already been done through the Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Office with both the Violence Prevention Council (1994-1996) and the Youth Council on Violence Prevention recommendations (1997-1999). In the works of both of these organizations you will find the seeds needed to grow a truly effective Statewide Violence Prevention Plan.

A State of California Youth Master Plan will provide a blueprint for the entire state to ensure consistency of effort in this important area. One of the lessons learned in our community is that many people were working in the same area of prevention but did not realize that others were doing essentially the same thing. When you get these various entities together, they can find ways to collaborate and produce a more effective program for less money. While this happens at the local level, I can only imagine the magnitude of the duplication of effort at the State level.

You may ask yourself in a State as diverse as California how a plan could be developed that would address the needs of a wide range of community needs. I think that you will find that violence and crime prevention tactics and techniques are much the same in Eureka as they are in San Diego. What is lacking is a consistency of understanding about what works and how. A Statewide Action Plan could go a long way in resolving the misunderstandings, confusion, duplication of effort and the constant "reinvention of the wheel" that takes place in the violence prevention world.

Importantly, if a plan is developed, the Legislature must support the recommendations of the plan through political action and money. In today's world of tight budgets and difficulty in just providing basic services, crime prevention strategies are often viewed as "extras." The State can send the message that violence prevention is not just an extra, but a fundamental part of what is expected from the law enforcement community. However, as we all know, this takes more than talk and definitely means funding!

In closing, I cannot help but go back to my original thoughts about this issue. Today's youth are interested in becoming tomorrow's leaders. We must offer them the opportunity to be positive leaders for non-violence, or many of them will become leaders of a different sort. Your commission can help this important process through its thoughtful insights and recommendations to ensure that we develop the leaders of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

JAMES E. BARRETT, Captain  
Chief of Police  
City of Ojai

Attachments:  
Power Plays  
Ojai Valley Youth Master Plan