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### **New Study Debunks Media Myth of Violent Youth. Interviews in Three Cities with Youth and Stakeholders Reveal the Youth Perspective and Reality.**

**This report is part of testimony before the House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, meeting on February 11, 2009.**

A new study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, examines the youth perspective on violence, life circumstances, and the response of the justice system to a supposed growth of violence among troubled youth. NCCD reviewed media coverage of youth crime in Washington, DC, Dallas, Texas, and San Mateo, California, compared that to actual arrest and incarceration statistics, and showed how falsehood has led to bad policy. The final and most unique portion of the research was qualitative interviews with youth and the professionals that work with them in the justice system.

Since the 1990s, some pundits have been warning about the rising tide of dangerous youth on the streets—warnings which turned out to be completely unfounded. A new wave of such rhetoric appears to be gaining momentum, especially if one looks at the number of news stories about violent youth, the lack of context that could offer perspective on the issue, and the distinct anti-youth bias these stories represent. Actual federal crime data in the three cities in our study show that reported crime and arrest rates have either declined steadily since the early 1990s or have risen slightly since 2000, but are still below the highs of the past 25 years.

Unfortunately, the manufactured hysteria about youth has led to harsh and ineffective policy.

The interviews with youth reveal that committed youth are self aware, clear about their responsibility in their behavior while at the same time, understanding of the forces that are out of their control. Although they don't seem to hold grudges against the adults in their lives, they see how adults have fallen short in helping them to succeed. Their home lives tend to be chaotic, their parents often have their own troubles and lack parenting skills, and they were dealt a hand of poverty, drugs, upheaval, and loss. In the words of some of the youth:

“My mom thinks it's all because of my friends, but I got to thinking about it and I've been banging before any of them [because of siblings and cousins who were already in gangs]. We all came through in the same neighborhood, all had life experiences and here we are. I guess in a lot of cases you do evolve around your environment.”

"I'm getting my GED right now, because when I get out if I'm eligible to go back to high school I don't want to go. High school is nothing but drama and I'm the kind of person, when I'm at school and I see another gang member, I'm a dumbass, I'm a hothead, I'm gonna get in a fight and I don't want to do that."

"They will give you assault charges and battery charges for a little fight and I'm like man it was a mutual fight and they are like take it to trial."

NCCD Recommendations:

- Educate the media AND the public.
- Promote healthy families and effective parenting.
- Establish access to better and quicker data sources
- Broaden training for police and probation officers.
- Remember that system-involved youth are youth.

Barry Krisberg, President, of NCCD is available to comment. Please contact him at 510-208-0500 x311, [bkrisberg@aol.com](mailto:bkrisberg@aol.com)

For more information, visit NCCD's website: [www.nccd-crc.org](http://www.nccd-crc.org)

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