



Sheriff®

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009 • VOLUME 61 • NUMBER 6

H1N1 PANDEMIC...

"A pandemic is much more than a health event," Bruce Gellin, MD, MPH, Director of the National Vaccine Program Office and Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Health and Human Services Department (HHS) to Coordinate U.S. Vaccination Efforts, tells WebMD. "Given the way a pandemic could play out, it has consequences across government and across society."



CRIME PREVENTION

October is Crime Prevention Month — See Inside!



Balance Crime Suppression and True Prevention for Real Results

By Lt. Kathleen Carey, PIO, Newport News Sheriff's Office, Newport News, Virginia



Is it time to begin overhauling our criminal justice system? Senator Jim Webb (D-Va.) thinks so. In a recent *Parade* magazine article that appeared nationally in many local Sunday newspapers he asked, "Why are so many Americans currently in prison compared with other countries and our own history? What is this policy costing our nation both in tax dollars and in lost opportunities?" Webb is introducing legislation that will create a commission whose job will be to reform the prison system.

Gabe Morgan, Sheriff of Newport News, Virginia points to empirical data which concludes the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" policy does not work. It was in the early 1980's when the United States implemented its most aggressive arrest policies. Laws designed to get criminals off the street were added to the books. And since that time, prison populations have quadrupled. However, questioned Sheriff Morgan, "I challenge you to ask yourself this question, 'Do you feel safer in your community today than you did in 1983?' If the answer to that is "no," then the bottom line is, the policy has failed."

If you believe, as Webb and Morgan do, that building more and more prisons is a failing strategy, what is the answer to crime prevention? Many politicians would not have even entertained that question a short time ago, but in

the age of budgetary constraints, advocates of prison reform now have a voice.

No one would argue the role for crime suppression in maintaining law and order. There are going to be arrests in a civilized society. But there is also a role for crime prevention.

Morgan's litmus test is simple. Are we afraid of the people we want jailed or are we mad at them? "If they did something that makes you afraid, then they need to be incarcerated. The guy who commits a robbery using a gun. We're afraid of him because he's putting people's life in danger. He needs to be behind concrete and iron. But if we're mad at them, then we need to find alternative ways to make them pay a debt to society." For example, a dead-beat parent could be placed under house arrest, made to work, and their finances managed by an overseeing agency that will ensure child support is taken out. "And he pays to be on the program," added Sheriff Morgan. "We remove the burden from the taxpayer and put the burden back on him."

The Newport News Sheriff's Office is trying to weave prevention into its daily operation. Inmates have access to rehabilitative programs. "We attempt to supply things that will help these young men and young ladies from re-offending. The community benefits because less crime

is committed. Secondly, the tax base is reduced because we don't have to pay for the upkeep and care of that inmate," explained Morgan.

The GED pass rate at the Newport News City Jail has been as high as 70%, a percentage that is competitive with any of the GED test sites citywide. Trades are also being taught at the jail. The volunteer instructor who teaches the fundamentals of sewing cleverly threads lifestyle lessons into her curriculum. Francine Douglas said, "Remember, a strong thread makes for a strong fabric. Your choices are your threads in life. Do you want your life's fabric to tear? Or do you want it to be durable? Just like when you are sewing, choose a good thread." A second kitchen at the jail will be used to prepare meals for the Meals on Wheels program. Inmates will earn a Serve Safe Certificate. Brick masonry, computers, anger management, finances, English as a Second Language, etc. These are a sampling of classes offered behind the walls of concrete and iron.

Prevention work goes beyond the walls of the jail. Older gang members are recruiting juveniles to do their dirty work because, if caught, a minor cannot be penalized as severely as an adult. Many are not locked up. For those who are, it

is for a very short time. "When they come out of juvenile detention, they have earned a status in the gang and are rewarded," said Morgan.

Recognizing that, sheriff's deputies started teaching gang resistance to 4th and 5th graders in each of the city's public elementary schools. "We believe by the time they get to middle school and high school we have already started to plant the seeds. Any other programs will water those seeds. And those nurtured seeds will grow into the kind of person that believes that non-violence is a good choice."

The Newport News Sheriff's Office is a partner in the local Weed & Seed Project. Weed & Seed is a community-based collaborative effort that builds partnerships between neighborhood residents, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, social service providers and businesses under the shared goal of "weeding" out violent crime and blight, while "seeding" in social services and neighborhood revitalization. Morgan is the Steering Committee Chairperson and helps to guide seven subcommittees aimed at serving the at-risk segment of the city. His public information officer sits on the Ex-Offender Reentry Subcommittee as its Advisor.

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In the area designated as a Weed & Seed site, violent crime saw a 20% drop in the first five months of 2009 compared to the same period in 2008. Property crime declined by 22% over the same time frame.

The Campaign for Youth Justice invited Sheriff Morgan to speak May 7, 2009 in the Nation's Capitol in recognition of Youth Advocacy Day. Morgan was joined on the panel by U.S. Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-Va.). Congressman Scott introduced the Youth PROMISE Act. The acronym stands for Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support and Education. The legislation supports evidence-based intervention and treatment that have been shown to reduce youth crime and delinquency.

Morgan explained the bill, "It addresses the underlying issues that plague communities so that we can eliminate the sources for lawlessness. The question is do we want to do something about future behavior. The answer for me is clearly 'yes.'"

It costs \$110,000 a year to incarcerate just one juvenile in Virginia. It would be wise to examine how much tutoring we could get for that kind of money. "If we can teach children to read on-grade by the third grade," said Morgan, "we can reduce the prison population in America. It we

spent time and resources tutoring that child who cannot read on-grade, it would cost us far less than the price tag of incarcerating that child."

"I look forward to working with Sheriff Morgan in the coming years," said Congressman Scott. He continued, "For years we have been codifying slogans and sound bites that do nothing to reduce crime. As a result of these policies, the average incarceration rate in the United States is far above the incarceration rates in other countries and incarcerating costs have risen to \$65 Billion per year. This legislation implements the recommendations of researchers, practitioners, analysts, and law enforcement officials from across the political spectrum concerning strategies to reduce gang violence and youth crime."

If passed, the Youth PROMISE Act would put billions toward keeping youth away from violence and crime. Not by putting them behind bars, but by creating plans to fill voids -- voids that make them receptive to gangs and crime.

Sheriff Morgan's rationale is that if you are successful on crime prevention, there is little need for crime suppression. "Think about your house. It is cheaper to build your house the way you want it than to go back and retrofit it. It's the same with crime. It is cheaper to prevent it than try to fight it." ★

