



WISCONSIN FAMILY IMPACT SEMINARS

Briefing Report - Executive Summary



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Cost-Effective Approaches in Juvenile and Adult Corrections

WHAT WORKS? WHAT DOESN'T?

In the last decade, the cost of corrections in Wisconsin increased from \$368 million in 1996 to \$956 million in 2006. Are there evidence-based approaches that could save tax dollars and still curb crime? For reducing juvenile crime, recent polls show the public would rather spend dollars on rehabilitation and prevention programs than on longer periods of incarceration. Are there effective programs that deter juveniles and adults who commit crimes from doing so again? In what ways do adolescents differ from adults and does this affect how they should be tried and treated in the justice system?

The first chapter is written by **Laurence Steinberg**, Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at Temple University and Director of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. Last year in Wisconsin, 6,083 17-year-olds were prosecuted in adult court. Studies show that juveniles differ from adults in ways that might affect their culpability, competence to stand trial, and response to treatment. For example, adolescent intelligence mirrors that of adults by age 16, but their psychosocial maturity is not fully developed until early adulthood. Adolescents may exercise poor judgment because they are impulsive, vulnerable to peer pressure, do not look long enough into the future, and tend to underestimate the risks of a crime and overestimate its rewards. Given their immaturity, youth under age 15 are not able to participate competently in criminal proceedings. Yet adolescents do know right from wrong and should be held accountable for their crimes. Of serious youth offenders, most can turn their lives around,

with only 10% becoming chronic, frequent offenders. Parents, through close monitoring, can help steer youth away from trouble. However, prosecuting youth in adult rather than juvenile court does not serve as a deterrent, with research showing it leads to more frequent and serious crimes six years later.

Next, **Steve Aos**, Assistant Director of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, discusses evidence-based public policy options to reduce criminal justice costs and crime rates. When incarceration rates increase 10%, research shows that crime rates go down about 3%. Yet incarceration is costly and in tight budget times, many states are looking for ways to spend less on prisons, save taxpayers' money, and still curb crime. The Washington Legislature requested a cost-benefit review of evidence-based rehabilitation and prevention programs to determine which reduce recidivism and can save money in the long run. Nineteen of the 29 programs for juvenile offenders and 12 of the 18 for adult offenders produced reductions in crime and benefits that outweighed the costs. Programs for juveniles produced especially attractive future economic returns. By implementing a portfolio of evidence-based programs, states are likely to keep the crime rate under control and, at the same time, lower the long-run costs of the local and state corrections systems.

The third chapter, written by **Carol Anderson**, Professor Emerita at Cornell University and **Karen Bogenschneider**, Professor and Director of the Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars, provides a guide for policymakers on the effectiveness of

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family approaches in juvenile justice programs. The corrections programs that yield the greatest return on investment are those targeted at juveniles. In a recent analysis, the five most cost-effective rehabilitation programs and the single most cost-effective prevention program deliberately worked with families: Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, Adolescent Diversion Project, Family Integrated Transitions, Functional Family Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, and the Nurse Family Partnership. This chapter summarizes how each of these programs works and what their outcomes have been. The effectiveness of these family approaches should come as no surprise given that one of the strongest predictors of juvenile crime is ineffective parenting. Many of these programs aim to recreate the powerful socialization forces of functional family life. However, the effectiveness of even these proven programs depends upon whether they are implemented properly. Policymakers can secure for families the priority they deserve in juvenile justice policy.

The fourth chapter by **Christina Carmichael** of the Legislative Fiscal Bureau explains the Juvenile Justice Code in Wisconsin. Under Wisconsin law, a juvenile is a person under the age of 18, except for violations of criminal law; since 1996, the state has prosecuted 17-year-olds as adults. Because Wisconsin has no separate juvenile court system, youth aged 10 to 16 are processed in circuit court. Counties are responsible for most juvenile delinquency-related expenses, including the \$76,300 average yearly cost of placement in a juvenile facility. Currently, the state provides counties with \$88.3 million of annual support through the community youth and family aids programs. One measure of the effectiveness of corrections programs is recidivism rates, defined as the number of juveniles released from a juvenile corrections facility who, within two years, were returned to a

juvenile facility with a new adjudication or newly sentenced to an adult prison. Between 2000 and 2003, annual juvenile recidivism rates in Wisconsin ranged from about 14% to 19%.

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The Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars are a series of presentations, discussion sessions, briefing reports, and newsletters designed for state policymakers. Since 1993 the Seminars have provided objective, solution-oriented research on timely family policy issues such as early childhood education, school financing, long-term care, and health care costs. The seminars feature a panel of premier researchers, policy analysts or program directors.

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