

Juvenile Crime in Maryland: A New Way to  
Tackle The Issue

Alexander Carcamo  
University of Maryland  
ENGL298C

## **Abstract:**

Juvenile crime is a problem that plagues our country. Many children will fall into a world filled with crime and will never come back. One of the main causes of juvenile crime is the fact that children who commit these crimes were raised in areas with high levels of poverty. Successful people who make it out of these poor communities will often associate their success to programs and organizations that taught them valuable life lessons while also being an activity they enjoy. To combat the issue of juvenile crime, the state of Maryland needs to implement better programs that allow children to engage in activities they enjoy. These changes are without a doubt the best route a state can take, especially when you consider the fact that programs like this that were implemented in the past, were successful in reducing the rate of crime.

## **Introduction:**

The United States of America has one of the highest juvenile crime rates, with Maryland being a top contributor. In 2017, Maryland ranked top 5 in juvenile arrests for weapon, robbery, and aggravated assault charges [1]. The state of Maryland does not invest enough of its resources in programs that can keep children away from crimes like this. Children are brought into the world innocent, and it is important that we guide them towards the correct opportunities while they are young. The best way to tackle youth crime is to provide programs and opportunities where they can engage in activities with others and find their talents. One such opportunity that can be strengthened are youth athletic programs. Youth sports programs have shown that they can help guide children away from the dangers of crime that goes on in their communities. Countless athletes in today's major leagues will highlight how they grew up in some of the worst neighborhoods in America and sports was their outlet from these violent and crime-filled areas. We're going to dive into how Maryland should strengthen these programs, but first let's take a look at the severity of the situation.

## **Findings:**

In the year 2017, the state of Maryland had a child poverty rate of 12% [2]. This means that 12% of children who are under the age of 18 lived with a family who had an income that was below the federal poverty level of \$25,000 per year. If you look into the specifics of Maryland youth poverty, you find that the main contributors to this problem are Somerset county, Dorchester county, Allegany county, and Baltimore City. These areas have a child poverty rate of 32.6%, 26.9%, 22.8%, and 31.8% respectively. It's no surprise that these areas are a major contributor in Maryland juvenile crime as well. The juvenile arrest rate, or number of arrests of juvenile children ages 10-17 per 10,000 youths was 352.7 for the entire state of Maryland. Somerset, Dorchester, Allegany, and Baltimore city all had a rate greater than 470 with Dorchester possessing a rate of 1,550 [3]. In 2014, the recidivism percentage, or percentage of

youths that were re-arrested within 12 months of their last arrest was 45.8% for the state of Maryland. Dorchester county had a rate of 57.1% and Baltimore city had a rate of 63.6% [4].

### **Discussions & Summary:**

Once children turn towards a life of crime, it is difficult for them to get away from it. They earn quick money through drug dealing, and they get a false sense of security while hanging around gang members. They damage their bodies with drugs and alcohol just to get a euphoric feeling that will last them a couple hours. In the journal article 'Poverty, Inequality, and Youth Violence' published in the year 2000, Ronald Kramer takes an extensive look at the root causes of juvenile crime. The article was published in response to the 1999 Columbine high school massacre. While some of the data provided is now 20 years outdated, it is shameful to say that the problem of school shootings is still prevalent today. The 2018 Stoneman Douglas shooting and the 2019 University of North Carolina at Charlotte shooting are some of the tragedies that have occurred in recent years. Both of these unfortunate events were caused by somebody who was deemed as antisocial or somebody who didn't come in contact a lot with other people [13][14]. Athletic programs would have given them a chance to connect with others and talk about any issues they may have going on in their lives. So why is it that this problem continues to plague our youth 20 years later? Kramer points towards poverty as one of the main causes for juvenile crime. He goes on to say that the United States has far more inequality in wealth when compared to other industrialized countries and that we are far less committed to providing a decent life to people who are considered poor [5]. To top it all off, children in the United States are far more likely to be poor than children who live in other democracies. He credits most of his research to the Luxembourg income study, which is a research program that looks into poverty, inequality and government spending [5]. They again highlight how the areas that are associated with wealth deprivation also have high rates of violence in the United States. The link between deprivation and violence is clear and distinct. Child poverty is without a doubt a main contributor to youth crime.

### **Recommendations and Implementation:**

While the issue of child poverty is difficult to tackle, one angle to prevent our youth from turning towards the streets is to encourage them to participate in sports programs instead. These would teach kids valuable life lessons, while also keeping them away from crime. There have been numerous instances where programs were created in poverty stricken areas, and they accomplished the task of reducing the rate of crime for these areas [6]. One such program was the Kickz program. Kickz was a 2006 partnership with the Premier League and the Metropolitan Police of England. They would have a night of coaching and a night of competition set across multiple communities in England [7]. Over 75% of the participants lived in the top 30% most deprived areas of England. 91% of the activity was conducted on a Friday or Saturday evening. They found that there was up to a 60% reduction in anti-social behavior where Kickz was set up.

On top of this, there was a 20% reduction in select crime that is most often associated with young people [7]. Another successful organization was the Midnight Basketball initiative that actually began in Maryland in the late 1980s. It sought to keep young people away from crime and instead have them engage in late night basketball games. It began as a way to combat the rising problem of crack cocaine that was prevalent in young people in the 1980s [8]. G. Van Standifer noticed that during the hours of 10pm to 2am, crime rates were incredibly high in Glenarden, Maryland. This was due to the fact that young people had nothing to do, they had no jobs, and were living in poverty. He in turn opened a recreation center where after 10 pm, these young people could instead come in and play basketball. He had officers supervise the event to make sure everything went well. Either before or after playing these games, the participants would also attend a workshop where they learned about the different necessities it takes to live in America. Some of the topics for these workshops include health and wellness, high school diploma/GED, respect for women, and economic prep. Most participants were between the ages of 17-26. It helped motivate many young men to go back to school and others to get a job, all while again accomplishing the goal of keeping them off the streets. After more and more cities began adopting this initiative, they began to see a drop in crime rates. Glenarden Maryland, where the program began, saw a reduction of 30% of crimes committed during these late hours. Phoenix had 10.4% less juvenile arrests, and 50% less juvenile related incidents [8]. It reached a point as to where Bill Clinton encouraged programs like Midnight Basketball in his 1994 anti-crime bill, but soon after the program folded due to disagreements once it reached the political level.

Although these programs provided only statistics for us to observe, there are numerous first hand accounts of how the sports industry has changed lives for the better. Professional Boxer Luis Collazo once said “Without boxing, I would have gone to prison, no question” [9]. His parents split when he was young and his father turned to alcoholism. By age nine he was selling marijuana in the streets of Brooklyn. NBA hall of famer Allen Iverson was born to a 15 year old mother in Hampton Virginia. His biological father left him at a young age and his adoptive father would move in and out of jail with various drug distribution charges [10]. Iverson himself was arrested and sentenced to prison for 15 years but after serving 4 months he received a pardon from the governor due to insufficient evidence in his case. These are just two of the many athletes across all sports who grew up with a rough background but were able to change their lives for the better thanks to the sports industries. There is an abundant amount of evidence that points towards sports programs as a healthy activity for young children to engage in, especially in areas where child poverty is high. After extensive research and learning about previous programs that have worked in reducing crime rates, the best thing for Maryland to do is to start implementing more of these programs in our communities. Areas like Baltimore City, Dorchester county, and Somerset county would greatly benefit from a revitalized version of the

Midnight Basketball programs. It would drop the number of juvenile arrests in these areas, and encourage young people to be successful with their lives in positive ways. Bringing back the workshops that participants attended would also educate our children while keeping them away from crime. Workshops on how to handle money, how to find a job, or even how to manage your time are skills that we do not currently learn as part of our education system and these are valuable life skills that should be taught. The group of people that should seek to implement these programs are those who hold offices in the state of Maryland. Governor Larry Hogan should experiment with adding some of our State funds to recreation centers across Maryland so that they can remain open during these late hours. If this is too broad of a scale, then the mayors of poverty-stricken cities should seek this reform. Places like Carroll county would not need to focus as much money into these programs, because their juvenile arrests rates were only at 163.5 per 10,000 youths for 2017. Much lower than the 352.7 Maryland average [3]. With the way most sports programs are set up now, children can only participate if they do it through their schools, or if they pay to play on a team. Not everybody can gather the funds necessary, and not every kid can commit to after school athletics. We need more non-profit organizations that will allow kids to come in and play whenever they choose. There should be different options so you can choose to play for fun or play competitively, all while allowing these children to play for free.

Athletic programs do much more than keeping children occupied. It teaches teamwork, hard work ethic, and social skills to name just a few positive outcomes. Sports is sometimes looked down upon because of the absurd amount of earnings professional athletes make. While the amount of money they make is up for debate, you can't discredit individuals who use their wealth and superstar status to make a positive impact. Just look at LeBron James who opened a school in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio in an area where child poverty is high. He named it the "I Promise School" after making a vow to decrease the high school dropout rate in his community [11]. There's also Kevin Durant who donated \$10 million to his hometown of Prince George's county, in a program that would help disadvantaged kids get to college [12]. A reform in the current programs we have is much needed. The current system we have does not allow for everyone to participate. It places too much focus on meeting certain qualifications or paying a certain amount to be able to play with peers. This disqualifies children living in poverty before they even have a chance, when it is them who would benefit from these programs the most. Instead of looking at sports as a pastime that a few lucky people can make millions from, we should look at it as an opportunity for people of all backgrounds to come together and enjoy their time together. People underestimate the positive impact that sports can have on children's lives, especially when you consider the fact that it gives citizens living in poverty an outlet away from their crime-filled communities.

## References:

- [1] National Center for Juvenile Justice, U. S. D. of J. (2018, October 22). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/qa05103.asp?qaDate=2017>
- [2] Casey , A. E. (2020). Children in poverty: KIDS COUNT Data Center. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/4460-children-in-poverty?loc=22&loct=5#detailed/5/3300,3302,3309,3319/true/871/any/10017,10018>
- [3] Casey, A. E. (2020). Juvenile arrests: KIDS COUNT Data Center. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/4461-juvenile-arrests?loc=22&loct=5#detailed/5/3300-3323/true/871/any/15102>
- [4] Casey, A. E. (2020). Recidivism year after release: KIDS COUNT Data Center. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/4131-recidivism-year-after-release?loc=22&loct=2#detailed/5/3300,3302,3309,3319/true/1248,1090,1001,943,839,742,70/any/17182,8667>
- [5] Kramer, R. (2000). Poverty, Inequality, and Youth Violence. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 567, 123-139. Retrieved May 7, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/1049498](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049498)
- [6] HARTJEN, C. (2008). Law. In *Youth, Crime, and Justice: A Global Inquiry* (pp. 1-22). NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY; LONDON: Rutgers University Press. Retrieved May 7, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hj4z8.6](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hj4z8.6)
- [7] Groombridge, N. (2016). Retraining: Crime prevention and desistance through sport. In *Sports criminology: A critical criminology of sport and games* (pp. 121-146). Bristol: Bristol University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1t89jdn.12
- [8] Hartmann, D., & Depro, B. (2006). Rethinking Sports-Based Community Crime Prevention: A Preliminary Analysis of the Relationship Between Midnight Basketball and Urban Crime Rates. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 30(2), 180–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723506286863>
- [9] Davies, G. A. (2014, April 30). 'Without boxing, I would have gone to prison, no question', says Amir Khan's opponent Luis Collazo. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/>

[othersports/boxing/10798626/Without-boxing-I-would-have-gone-to-prison-no-question-says-Amir-Khans-opponent-Luis-Collazo.html](https://www.espn.com/boxing/story/_/id/10798626/Without-boxing-I-would-have-gone-to-prison-no-question-says-Amir-Khans-opponent-Luis-Collazo.html)

[10] Jacob, Z. (2017, August 17). Allen Iverson's 15-year prison sentence almost robbed us of "The Answer". Retrieved from <https://www.theversed.com/65192/allen-iversons-15-year-prison-sentence-almost-robbed-us-of-the-answer/#.FsqbgDIHVM>

[11] Wikipedia. (2020, April 10). I Promise School. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Promise\\_School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Promise_School)

[12] Ortiz, J. (2018, February 25). Kevin Durant donates \$10 million to Prince George's Co. students. Retrieved from <https://wtop.com/prince-georges-county/2018/02/kevin-durant-donates-10-million-students-prince-georges-co/>

[13] Miller, C. M., & Gurney, K. (2018, February 20). Parkland shooter always in trouble, never expelled. Could school system have done more? Retrieved from <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/article201216104.html>

[14] Henderson, B. (2019, May 3). 'Never in a million years.' Granddad of UNCC shooting suspect grapples with aftermath. Retrieved from <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article229983719.html>