

MAKE YOUR DAY BETTER WITH MORE LOW FARES

Fares starting from **\$49** each way\*

jetBlue HAPPY JETTING

Book now

Replay? \*TAXES, FEES AND RESTRICTIONS APPLY

Not Logged In Login / Sign-up

# ★chron | Viewpoints, Outlook

NOW 79°

NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE TRAVEL BLOGS JOBS HOMES CARS CLASSIFIEDS

Facebook Twitter

Comments Recommend Like

Search advanced search | archives GO

Chron.com Web Search by YAHOO!

## In juvenile justice, less often more

By MARC A. LEVIN  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE  
May 9, 2010, 10:44PM

### Share

- Del.icio.us
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Digg
- Yahoo! Buzz
- StumbleUpon

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

Looking for a good value on lodging in the city that never sleeps? Don't bother with New York City's juvenile detention center. It goes for \$620 a night or \$226,300 for a year, about twice the typical rate at the Ritz-Carlton. This almost makes Texas Youth Commission (TYC) lockups seem like a bargain at \$271 a night or \$98,915 a year.

Whether in the Big Apple or the Rio Grande Valley, taking a bite out of taxpayers' wallets might make sense if it took a large bite out of crime. However, research shows that for most youths, incarceration is less effective than evidence-based juvenile probation programs that supervise and treat youths in their homes and communities.

An abuse scandal at TYC and a 55 percent reoffense rate sparked reforms in 2007 to divert more youths into community-based programs. Since then, the TYC population has dropped from 3,400 to 2,200. Even now, about half of TYC youths were committed for burglary, drugs, theft or other nonviolent offenses.

Most important, juvenile crime has declined while TYC has downsized. In 2009, 20,943 Texas youths were adjudicated for an offense, a drop from 24,965 in 2006, despite 3 percent juvenile population growth.

Taxpayers have saved more than \$200 million from a smaller TYC, even after reinvesting \$100 million in probation to supervise youths who would previously have been sent to TYC.

First, in 2007, lawmakers redirected from TYC misdemeanants such as marijuana, graffiti and alcohol offenders. Probation departments received \$57.8 million over two years to handle these 800 youths, who would have cost approximately \$150 million to house at TYC.

Second, last year, lawmakers provided nearly \$46 million in grants to fund community-based programs in jurisdictions that pledged to lower commitments to TYC, which results in net savings. Each program is regularly evaluated with continued funding based on performance measures such as reoffending.

However, juvenile justice is at another crossroads due to a projected state budget shortfall of \$10 billion to \$15 billion.

Counties also face budget shortfalls, with Harris and Dallas counties asking departments to identify savings. Counties fund nearly two-thirds of juvenile probation. Thus, a strong fiscal partnership between the state and counties is vital to ensure that youths are not sent to TYC simply because less costly and often more effective community-based options are unavailable.

Texas can continue saving money and protecting public safety by renewing support for probation departments' TYC diversion initiatives that more than pay for themselves as they enable TYC to continue downsizing.

For example, intensive in-home programs with both a probation officer and family therapist making frequent home visits significantly reduce recidivism and cost a fraction of TYC. As such local programs take root, juvenile crime continues to drop, and TYC commitments have fallen 38 percent this year. Every youth redirected from TYC saves taxpayers about \$80,000 a year.

For all but the most serious and high-risk offenders, incarceration often increases reoffending, as lower-risk youths are negatively influenced by higher-risk peers and positive bonds with their family, church and community are frayed. While effective in-home programs address the lack of discipline and other underlying family issues typically at the root of delinquency, these problems may remain unsolved after a nonviolent youth stays for an average of 11 months at TYC and returns to the same setting.

Texas has made remarkable progress in lowering juvenile crime while reducing costs. Policymakers can build on these gains for public safety and taxpayers by continuing to strengthen community-based programs that hold juveniles accountable through proven supervision and treatment strategies, ensuring that the most costly destination for Texas youths is truly the last resort.

*Levin is the director of the Center for Effective Justice at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a nonprofit, free-market research institute based in Austin.*

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Only \$2 a week

SUBSCRIBE

Charmin Ultra Soft

Use 4x Less\* with America's Softest Bath Tissue.

Charmin Ultra Soft vs. the leading value brand

Buy Now

- Chemicals to fight oil spill pose threat to wildlife, too
- Motorcyclist killed after crashing into guardrail
- Mom clings to hope despite losing limbs after childbirth
- BP trying to distance itself from spill disaster
- Realignment may drastically change college landscape

- SWAT scene underway near West University(184)
- Obama expected to reveal Supreme Court pick soon(65)
- AP source: Obama chooses Kagan for Supreme Court(15)
- Officers in boy's alleged beating drew complaints before(9)
- Texas will be releasing some inmates closer to home(8)

- Did a single week reverse energy fortunes forever?
- In juvenile justice, less is often more
- Thomas Friedman: Tooth Fairy politics gives way to root canal
- Letters to the editor

- TYC planning to move youths closer to homes
- Juveniles get longer terms as arrests dip
- How much does the Harris County Department of Education cost taxpayers? (updated)
- Nuggets' Anthony apologizes for arrest on DUI charge
- Parole, probation violators add to crowding
- Sex registry called too harsh for juveniles
- Wednesday's newsclips: The stork leaves Kilgore
- In the hands of U.S. teens: more pot, fewer cigarettes
- Lt. Gov. Dewhurst calling for more prisons
- Causey lands at federal prison near Bastrop

## Comments

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's [terms and conditions](#) of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of the Houston Chronicle. Readers whose comments violate the terms of use may have their comments removed or all of their content blocked from viewing by other users without notification.

You must be logged in to comment. Login | Sign up

Comment input field

Comment

San Diego's Red Carpet Sale

Save up to 40% on Hotel Stays with VIP Perks

travelocity See Deals

<b>MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY</b> ☆ <a href="http://DoGood.chron.com">DoGood.chron.com</a>	Won't you please help?	
--	------------------------	--

**[Buy Stocks - \\$4 Fee at ShareBuilder](#)**

No account or investment minimums.  
[www.sharebuilder.com](http://www.sharebuilder.com)

**[Health Insurance Plans](#)**

Get Free Quotes and Compare Health Plans.  
[IndividualHealthQuotes.com/Official](http://IndividualHealthQuotes.com/Official)



**[Pay More Than \\$44/Mo on Car Insurance?](#)**

Car Insurance Top Secret Exposed - We've  
[Auto-Insurance-Experts.com](http://Auto-Insurance-Experts.com)

**[Compare Auto Insurance Quotes](#)**

Compare 5 Auto Insurance Quotes in  
[www.NetQuote.com](http://www.NetQuote.com)

Ads by Yahoo!

<b>CHRON</b> Home Houston & Texas Nation Business Sports Entertainment Life Travel Corrections Blogs	Weather Chron Commons Traffic  <b>TOPICS</b> PetsHouston MomHouston HoustonBelief Houston gardening 29-95	<b>NEIGHBORHOODS</b> Aldine/North Houston Alief/Southwest Bellaire/West U/River Oaks Clear Lake Conroe Cy-Fair East End/Third Ward Fort Bend Heights/Nearatown Katy	Kingwood Humble/Lake Houston Memorial/Spring Branch Pasadena/Baytown Pearland area Spring/Klein Tomball Magnolia The Woodlands	<b>MARKETPLACE</b> Jobs Homes Cars Classifieds Personals Place a classified ad Place a retail ad Contests	<b>SERVICES</b> Help Business directory Legal notices Contact us Send us tips About the company Employment opportunities Advertise with us Buy a banner ad	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b> Sign up Log in  <b>OTHER EDITIONS</b> Home delivery Mobile RSS feeds Chronicle In Education e-Edition E-mail newsletters
<b>LOCAL SERVICES</b> <a href="#">Houston Attorneys</a> <a href="#">Houston Salons</a>		 				

[Privacy statement](#) | [Terms of service](#) | [About Our Ads](#)  
 Copyright © 2010 The Houston Chronicle

