

# *Innocent Until Proven Guilty: A Solution for America's Failed Military Transparency*

By Cameron Davis, *Roosevelt @ Columbia*

## **Thesis**

America's lack of transparency with regards to civilian casualties caused by drone strikes has led to decreasing trust in government. By redefining "enemy combatant" in military reports from just "any military-age male in a strike zone" to "a person unambiguously engaged in hostilities against the United States," the US can establish a healthier relationship with its citizens and foreign states.

## **Background Analysis**

Since the first recorded kill by an American unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) – in Kandahar, Pakistan, in October 2001, by a Predator operated from Langley, Virginia<sup>1</sup> – UCAVs have been deeply contentious. The capability of an American citizen to take a life from thousands of miles away is unpopular abroad and unnerving domestically.<sup>2</sup>

Given the Obama administration's significant use of combat drones<sup>3</sup> and the expected increase of drone usage by the incoming president<sup>4</sup>, American drone policy with regards to civilian casualties must improve urgently. The public has the right to know if drones are killing non-combatants, but the administration's operating definition of "enemy combatant" has been revised to be intentionally vague, from "a person engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners during an armed conflict" to "any military-age male in a drone strike zone."<sup>56</sup>

The administration's extremely low bar for culpability – presuming that any man between the ages of 16 and 50 who happens to be within a target's area is a terrorist himself – flouts the traditional American standard of "innocent until proven guilty" and weakens the fiber of trust both domestically and abroad around American military operations. International actors are angered by the undercounting of civilian deaths, which in turn threatens the security of Americans. Moreover, justifying drone strikes against ambiguous targets puts more disenfranchised foreign citizens in harm's way. The continuous misrepresentation of civilian deaths will likely deeply harm the US in the short and long term.

### **KEY FACTS**

- Best estimates of all civilian deaths as a result of drone strikes over the past several years in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan lie around 1,300 (of roughly 8,000 total deaths).<sup>11</sup>
- Even when actual combatants are killed, drones are still remarkably imprecise; attempts to kill just 41 targeted men resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,147 people as of 24 November 2014.<sup>12</sup>
- In 39 of 44 countries surveyed in 2014, the majorities or pluralities of the populations opposed U.S. drone strikes targeting extremists abroad.<sup>13</sup>
- Bush authorized approximately 50 drone strikes in his entire presidency; Obama had authorized 506 as of January 2016.<sup>14</sup>

- Current American drone policy dictates that all “military-age males in a strike zone” are considered enemy combatants for the sake of casualty reports
- Systemic lack of military transparency is harmful to American image abroad, and even puts the legitimacy of the US government into question for its own citizens<sup>7</sup>
- The US government should change the definition of “enemy combatant” to be in line with traditional and international standards to restore transparency and trust

## Policy Idea

Current American policy in labeling casualties of drone strikes is a form of “guilty until proven innocent”: all military-age males killed in the strike zone are assumed to be somehow complicit and are thus “enemy combatants.” The US government, primarily through the work of the incoming president’s administration, the CIA, and the Department of Defense, should employ a version of the historic American definition of “enemy combatant” in considering casualties of drone strikes, replacing the current operational definition with “a person unambiguously engaged in hostilities against the United States.”

## Policy Analysis

While ending American usage of drones would improve international sentiments towards the US and reduce the number of civilian casualties abroad, the cost and labor efficiency of drones mean that their complete abandonment is mere fantasy.<sup>8</sup> Instead, changing the structure in which drones operate is the best solution to the problems caused by their existence.

The biggest concern that the general public harbors with combat drone strikes is a concern over civilian deaths.<sup>9</sup> The definitional change would alleviate this tension in two key ways. First, by operating under a more legitimate definition of combatants, American military reports would be subject to less of the second-guessing than they are now. Accepting and publishing more representative statistics would reestablish American legitimacy and begin to mend trust lost from years of underreporting civilian casualties. Second, changing the definition incentivizes the US government to improve the precision of drone strikes so as to prevent the risk of having to admit to high civilian deaths. Even if improvements in military technology are only a long-term solution, in the short term the administration would be pushed to simply authorize fewer drone strikes, which is a marginal improvement on balance.

Holding the US government more responsible, and pushing back against the institutional lack of transparency and consistent human rights violations in the killing of civilians, saves actual lives. With hundreds of civilians dying unnecessarily every year,<sup>10</sup> even marginally reducing the mortality rates of combat drones in just one country or region could save untold civilian lives. Directly affecting the safety of military-age males in drone-targeted countries, decreasing radicalization in these countries, and indirectly benefiting American citizens, this policy is both the rational and moral solution to a callous definition.

## Next Steps

Because the existing policy is an internal procedure (as in, not a piece of legislation or an on-the-books ruling), changing it must be done primarily through indirect pressure on the president or CIA. Most specifically, the policy change would likely come from a bipartisan Congressional push through a formal letter or a sense of Congress resolution. Key allies on the matter are vast and varied, from dove-ish establishment liberals like Representatives Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), to conservatives concerned with government transparency including Representatives Lynn Jenkins (R-KS) and Mike Coffman (R-CO), to nonpartisan think tanks like the libertarian Cato Institute.

The success of the outreach and subsequent policy change is measurable in two key data points – international approval rates of American drone usage, and civilian casualties from drone strikes. Keeping these two measurements as a gauge for the success of the policy in its next steps is invaluable.

## End Notes

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# Time is Brain: Expanding Access to Stroke Care in Rural Georgia Communities

By Anita Qualls, Roosevelt @ U of Georgia

## Thesis

The Georgia Composite Medical Board should require continued stroke education as part of the Georgia emergency physician licensure process, thereby cross-training emergency physicians on the recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of stroke to improve patient survival and recovery outcomes in rural areas.

## Background Analysis

Eighty percent of strokes are preventable, yet stroke remains the fifth most common cause of death in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Georgia is in a geographical region known as the “stroke belt,” characterized by 1.3–1.5 times higher stroke mortality rates.<sup>2</sup> Underlying poor health conditions and regional differences in quality and funding of healthcare continue to limit the availability of resources to provide a sufficient standard of stroke care for rural populations.<sup>3</sup> The persistence of these disparities can be seen through four recent Georgia rural hospital closings, excessive spending on stroke and disability, and increased chance of death from stroke in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

Tissue-plasminogen activator (t-PA), an effective drug therapy treatment for acute ischemic stroke, can only be administered within the initial 3–4.5 hours following a stroke—a time known as the “golden window.”<sup>5</sup> Treatment with t-PA is effective for correctly diagnosed acute ischemic stroke patients; however, administration of t-PA to non-stroke patients can have serious, life-threatening consequences.<sup>6</sup> Due to the ambiguity of stroke symptoms and lack of neurological expertise, t-PA is 10 times less likely to be utilized in rural and underserved hospital settings compared to urban areas.<sup>7,8</sup>

Presently, 128 of 155 Georgia counties lack any neurological services or personnel.<sup>9</sup> The demand for neurologists in Georgia is already 20 percent over supply, and with a relative peak expected in the next 5 to 15 years, it is imperative that the absence of neurological expertise be addressed immediately for the well-being of rural Georgia communities.<sup>10</sup>

### KEY FACTS

- Stroke is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the U.S.<sup>22</sup>
- A stroke victim loses 1.9 million neurons for every minute of untreated care, creating increased risk of permanent brain damage or death without immediate treatment.<sup>23</sup>
- Sixty-five percent of physicians reported feeling uncomfortable giving t-PA without a consultation.<sup>24</sup>
- On average, a person in the United States has a stroke every four seconds and a person dies from a stroke every four minutes.<sup>25</sup>

## Talking Points

- Strokes require immediate care and treatment due to its serious and time-sensitive nature.<sup>11</sup>
- There is a lack of access to acute stroke care in rural Georgia, with respect to an absence of neurological expertise and appropriate infrastructure to accurately identify and treat stroke victims.
- Rural emergency physicians responsible for stroke patients lack the expertise in neurological diagnoses to deal with the unpredictability and ambiguity of stroke attacks.<sup>12</sup>
- Effective treatment and diagnosis of stroke require high-level communication and collaboration from a complex web of key players, ranging from emergency medical dispatchers to medical service systems.<sup>13</sup>

## Policy Idea

To improve access to stroke care, a stroke education course should be implemented as part of the continued education hours for emergency physicians. The Georgia Composite Medical Board should require this course as part of the state's physician licensure process. Stroke education increases physician familiarity with the correct recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of acute ischemic stroke and would improve patient care in rural areas without exacerbating the demand for neurological personnel.

## Policy Analysis

Due to the lack of neurological personnel in rural Georgia, emergency physicians without neurological expertise are forced to determine whether potential stroke patients need t-PA therapy treatment within the golden window.<sup>14</sup> By incorporating stroke education into the emergency physician licensure requirements, the disproportionate mortality rates and suffering of rural stroke patients should be improved.

The policy solution addressing this issue originates from a study on stroke diagnostic accuracy that implemented a stroke recognition and education protocol for ambulatory services at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle, UK.<sup>15</sup> With appropriate training, ambulance paramedics correctly identified a higher proportion of patients with stroke and facilitated more rapid referral to physicians.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the introduction of a four-hour seminar on stroke education increased paramedics' rate of stroke recognition from 61 percent to 91 percent.<sup>17</sup> Thus, rural patients presenting with stroke symptoms may be recognized by emergency personnel more quickly and physicians may be able to formulate stroke diagnoses more accurately, meaning stroke patients at rural hospitals may have a better chance of treatment and recovery.

Emergency telemedicine management of stroke ("telestroke") has become an increasingly popular diagnostic technique utilized for the treatment of stroke victims in distant or rural locations that lack neurological expertise. However, factors such as lack of funding for infrastructure and technology, logistical challenges of outsourcing neurologists, and the uniqueness of emergency care make this policy unfeasible for statewide implementation.<sup>18 19 20</sup>

## Next Steps

The Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) already offers Advanced Stroke Life Support training, a course utilized across the country to teach the emergency assessment and management of acute stroke, at no cost to hospitals participating in the Georgia Coverdell Acute Stroke Registry.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the GDPH and the Georgia Composite Medical Board must collaborate to establish this course or a similar one as the standard for stroke emergency physician education across all of Georgia. Then, a bill should be introduced to the Georgia General Assembly mandating annual stroke continued education requirements as part of the licensure process for all Georgia emergency physicians. The American Heart Association and the Georgia Rural Health Association are key allies for lobbying and connecting to the GDPH, as they are dedicated to reducing stroke mortality rates and enhancing

## End Notes

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# Price Transparency: Empowering Patients and Lowering Healthcare Costs

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## Thesis

This policy seeks to lower health care costs in Chicago by providing patients with information on insurance- and provider-based costs before a procedure. This would then create competition between companies, which would lower health costs overall.

## Background Analysis

The cost of health care is growing at an unsustainable rate. In 2014, the nation spent \$3 trillion, or 17.5 percent GDP, on health care. The projected growth rate is 1.3 percent faster than the U.S.'s project GDP growth rate, which means health costs would be 20.1 percent of GDP by 2025.<sup>1</sup> The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget claims, "The growth of federal health spending represents the single largest fiscal challenge facing the United States government."<sup>2</sup> Something must be done to reduce the cost.

In 2004, hospitals only received 38 percent of what they "charged" from patients and insurers.<sup>3</sup> This is because the charges are arbitrary; the true payment is negotiated between the insurer and the hospital but not disclosed to the patient. This system does not allow consumers to compare prices across insurers or hospitals. This causes an economic market failure known as information asymmetry, which in turn makes the market less effective.

Other locales have taken steps to address this problem. For example, New Hampshire has developed a pricing database<sup>4</sup> for every hospital in the state; this increases transparency, creates inter-hospital competition, and lowers overall health costs.

## KEY FACTS

- Approximately half of all the 1.5 million American families filing for bankruptcy cited medical reasons, and over 75 percent of those families had insurance.<sup>11</sup>
- Prices for the same procedure in the same city can vary wildly. The average bill to treat pneumonia in Dallas can vary from \$14,610 to \$38,000.<sup>12</sup>
- The U.S. spends substantially more on health care than other developed countries. As of 2009, health spending in the U.S. was about 90 percent higher than in many other industrialized countries.<sup>13</sup>

## Talking Points

- Health care costs are growing faster than U.S. GDP.<sup>5</sup> If something is not done to stem costs, this crucial system will cease to function.

- Providing consumers with specific prices from health care providers and insurance companies will create competition, which will lower prices substantially, as seen in California <sup>6</sup>.
- Allowing customers to compare prices remedies the problem of asymmetric information, thus lowering medical costs, as seen in New Hampshire and California.

### Policy Idea

This policy aims at tackling growing health care costs by introducing a system of health cost transparency into the hospital and health insurance system in Chicago. Hospitals and insurance providers in Chicago should work together to create a database that empowers consumers by providing them with provider- and insurance-specific prices for common medical services, allowing them to compare costs.

### Policy Analysis

This policy would benefit the Chicago community because of its simple implementation and significant impact: It does not require extravagant funding and can be implemented in minimal time with no extensive transition period. The concept of a medical database has been tried, tested, and revised in New Hampshire and the Oklahoma Surgery Center (OSC). The effectiveness of New Hampshire's policy was hampered by the state's rural geography; the lack of hospitals meant a lack of competition.<sup>7</sup> This would not be an issue in Chicago because of its urban geography, where there are multiple hospitals that can compete.

The results of these previous examples suggest that this policy would lower health costs for consumers. The power dynamics of price negotiation have transformed because of New Hampshire's program, the OSC, and the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS). Dr. Keith Smith of the OSC has stated that the center has caused deflationary effects on health care pricing in Oklahoma City.<sup>8</sup> Those in the CalPERS community have experienced similar price-lowering effects. After employers implemented a plan that caused CalPERS members to seek lower-cost facilities, costs decreased by 5.6 percent in low-price facilities and 34.3 percent at high-cost facilities.<sup>9</sup> Since public scrutiny has increased in New Hampshire, hospitals are incentivized to negotiate with insurance companies to lower prices. Insurance companies like Anthem BCBS have developed programs where customers can decide to receive a procedure in a lower-cost facility.<sup>10</sup> If there is a price variation, the insurance company will grant customers a monetary reward, thus making the process more cost-effective.

### Next Steps

The plan is to pass the policy on the Chicago City Council level. Our most powerful ally would be the NGO Illinois Public Interest Research Group (IL PIRG), which is already working on reining in health care costs. Our key targets for supporting its implementation would be Alderman James Cappleman and the Illinois Chapter of Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA). Alderman Cappleman sits on the Committee on Health and Environmental Protection and was a social worker in the health care field before his time in office. Because of his background and his political position, he is susceptible to lobbying to support this policy and help pass it in the city council. HFMA is a national organization of health care finance leaders that works to better the finances of the health care system. HFMA would be an important ally because of their contacts in the field and assistance in lobbying.

## End Notes

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# Reducing Insurance Illiteracy: Teaching Health Insurance in Georgia Health Classes

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## Thesis

The Georgia Department of Education should amend its performance standards for high school health education to include material on health insurance enrollment, costs, and options, providing students with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to make informed decisions.

## Background Analysis

As defined by the American Institutes of Research, health insurance literacy measures an individual's capacity to understand, evaluate, select, and utilize health insurance plans.<sup>1</sup> Fifty-one percent of American consumers do not understand at least one basic health insurance term, while 42 percent are unlikely to check the details of a health insurance plan before enrolling.<sup>2</sup> Only 20 percent are able to accurately calculate the cost of a doctor's visit. Individuals who are younger, less-educated, lower-income, minorities, or who use health care services less frequently have the lowest levels of health insurance literacy, which puts them at greater risk for negative health and financial outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

Given the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 and the possibility of another major healthcare shift following the 2016 presidential election, health insurance literacy is especially urgent, as it is essential for consumers' health and financial wellbeing. However, the Georgia Performance Standards for Health Education only require high school curricula to enable students to "determine the relationship between health insurance coverage and life expectancy." Although high school health education standard HE H.S.3 expects students to "demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health," no curricula address access to and usage of health insurance resources or services.<sup>4</sup>

## Talking Points

- Consumer health and financial wellbeing depend on substantial health insurance literacy.
- Teaching high school students about health insurance resources, options, costs, and processes would prepare them to make informed and financially sustainable health care decisions.
- Incorporating health insurance into existing high school health curricula would maximize the reach of such instruction and, over time, alleviate health insurance literacy disparities across age, education level, and income.

## Policy Idea

The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) should amend high school health education standard HE H.S.3 to include an element addressing health insurance, for curricular implementation beginning Fall 2020. The proposed element should require all Georgia high school health

## KEY FACTS

- Fifty-one percent of American health insurance consumers understand no basic health insurance terms.<sup>15</sup>
- Health insurance literacy is lowest among individuals who are younger, less educated, or lower-income, as well as minorities and those who use health care services less frequently.<sup>16</sup>
- Average expenditures on training and professional development for full-time-equivalent instructors amounted to \$475.16 in fiscal year 2016, compared to the \$33,424 base salary required to hire a new instructor in Georgia for the 2015–16 school year.<sup>17,18</sup>

curricula to include a basic understanding of health insurance terminology, explain the variety of health insurance plans available to Georgia residents, outline the process of enrolling in health insurance, demonstrate the use and application of health insurance in realistic scenarios, and prepare students to seek additional information on health insurance.

### Policy Analysis

GADOE's Division of Curriculum and Instruction has unilateral power to modify standards without legislation, shielding it from political obstacles.<sup>5</sup> Supplementing existing curricula rather than constructing new curricula minimizes costs; hiring a new instructor in 2015–16 required a base salary of \$33,424, while Georgia's average expenditure on training per full-time-equivalent staff member was only \$475.16 in 2016.<sup>67</sup> Evidence indicates the effectiveness of other health insurance literacy initiatives; in a Montana detention center, inmates demonstrated increased knowledge and confidence regarding health insurance after attending workshops.<sup>8</sup>

The correlations between age, education, and health insurance literacy underscore the need for early education. Forty-three percent of individuals aged 18–29 scored low on a health insurance literacy assessment, while 61 percent of participants aged 50–64 scored high. Forty-five percent of those who at most completed secondary education performed poorly, compared to 10 percent of college graduates.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the potential audience for such instruction shrinks after high school: In 2014, 31.6 percent of recent high school graduates in the U.S. were not enrolled in college, with a 28.8 percent gap between high- and low-income students.<sup>10</sup> This proposal would prepare students for the eventual necessity of health insurance, including individuals not pursuing post-secondary education and those without parental support. This change would alleviate disparities across age and education level, ensuring that all young Georgians develop a fundamental understanding of health insurance.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the future of U.S. health care policy, health insurance will continue to play a crucial role in Americans' wellbeing. Annual training and individual discretion will allow instructors to stay up-to-date on insurance policies and provide students with accurate information about the latest system, ensuring the continuation of health insurance literacy education in the face of political shifts.

### Next Steps

Because of its devotion to research-based instruction, GADOE's Division of Curriculum and Instruction should pilot the policy in Atlanta Public Schools, given its large proportions of low-income and minority students.<sup>1112</sup> The team should assess students before and after instruction to gauge health insurance literacy improvements and consider results during the next review of health education standards.

Educators, parents, and industry representatives are the most powerful stakeholders in revising educational standards.<sup>13</sup> Joint advocacy by local school boards, Georgia PTAs, and health educators, who have a vested interest in student health and success, should target the Division of Curriculum and Instruction and State Board of Education members.

After revising HE H.S.3, GADOE should assemble a panel of health educators and insurance agents to develop content frameworks guiding instructors through the new curriculum.<sup>14</sup> Health insurance agencies should act as allies by funding teacher training and instructional materials.

### End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> “Half of U.S. Adults Fail ‘Health Insurance 101,’ Misidentify Common Financial Terms in Plans,” American Institute of CPAs, August 27, 2013, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.aicpa.org/press/pressreleases/2013/pages/us-adults-fail-health-insurance-101-aicpa-survey.aspx>.

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<sup>11</sup> “Curriculum and Instruction,” Georgia Department of Education 2016

<sup>12</sup> “K-12 Public Schools Report Card,” The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://gosa.georgia.gov/student-and-school-demographics>.

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<sup>16</sup> American Institutes for Research 2014

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<sup>18</sup> Georgia Department of Education 2015



# *Pads in Prisons: Addressing Gender Disparities in New York State*

By Francine Barchett, Roosevelt @ Cornell

## **Thesis**

To fulfill a basic human right, New York State prisons should provide a steady supply of menstrual hygiene products inside female inmates' cells.

## **Background Analysis**

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) fails to provide its 4,000 incarcerated women with adequate menstrual hygiene products (MHPs). A 2015 Correctional Association of New York (CA) report reveals that 85 percent of female inmates are of menstrual age yet 54 percent do not receive a sufficient supply of sanitary pads.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, tampons are typically not provided in prisons, even though they are a preferred product of over 40 percent of American women.<sup>2</sup>

Currently no policy exists for MHP distribution in New York prisons, although New York City is an exception. In July 2016, the city unanimously passed a law mandating free tampons and pads for schools, homeless shelters, and prisons.<sup>3</sup> They declared that MHPs are a necessity, not a luxury, since insufficient use may increase reproductive infections and lead to prolonged skin irritation and toxic shock syndrome.<sup>4</sup>

The CA study stated that prisons typically delegate 10 pads per month to female inmates, which is far below the recommended amount of 20 per monthly cycle.<sup>5,6</sup> Furthermore, cycles range in length and intensity, occurring every 21 to 35 days, lasting from 2 to 7 days, and with intensities varying from light to heavy.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, since prisoners' weekly wages equate to the price of a 20-pack of MHPs, few of them have the purchasing ability.<sup>8</sup> In order to alleviate these atrocious conditions, it is essential to formulate policy that regulates MHP distribution.

## **KEY FACTS**

- More than 85 percent of New York female prisoners are of menstruating age, but 54 percent do not receive a sufficient quantity of menstrual hygiene products.<sup>19</sup>
- Incarcerated women in New York experience difficulty purchasing additional MHPs because the average prison wage is 75 cents a day and 72 percent of the inmates come from lower-income households.<sup>20,21</sup>
- To meet women's menstrual needs, New York prisons would need to distribute about 68,000 MHPs annually, which would cost approximately \$13,000.<sup>22,23,24</sup>



## Talking Points

- Depriving women of sufficient MHPs increases their risk of reproductive infections, skin irritation, and toxic shock syndrome, in addition to degrading their personal dignity.<sup>9</sup>
- New York State should enact a law that requires prisons to supply weekly MHP boxes inside female inmates' cells, as opposed to the New York City law allowing prison personnel to distribute MHPs upon request.<sup>10</sup>
- Prisons throughout New York should also provide tampons along with pads to increase women's sense of agency and provide for their personalized needs.

## Policy Idea

Provision of sufficient MHPs to New York's incarcerated women should be mandated through state legislation. Rather than receive MHPs in minimum quantities or upon request, women should be able to decide how many they need. In addition, state jails should emulate New York City's idea of providing tampons alongside pads as opposed to exclusively providing pads. Adding the commodities to the state's soap and toilet paper budget and refilling cells weekly with containers of pads and tampons will further improve the status of female inmates.

## Policy Analysis

A New York State law for the provision of tampons and pads to female prisoners would largely echo New York City's recent menstrual policy.<sup>11</sup> Unlike New York City, however, the state policy would safeguard women's privacy and prevent potential abuse by requiring prison personnel to place refillable boxes of MHPs in cells.

Besides preserving female dignity, an MHP prison policy would enable women to maintain personal health in spite of financial challenges. Studies attest that imprisoned females experience unusually stressful menstrual cycles, but few can pay the extra wages to purchase MHPs.<sup>12 13</sup> Those who ask for additional feminine items must apply for a medical permit, which is both time-consuming and usually unsuccessful.<sup>14</sup> Considering that women are recommended to use four pads or tampons per day for a five-day monthly cycle, state prisons would need to supply approximately 68,000 MHPs annually for their 3,400 inmates of menstruating age.<sup>4 7</sup> Although this may sound costly, it would only amount to about \$13,000 based on the current prices of Walgreen's, a top MHP provider.<sup>15</sup> In the long term, having women choose their own MHPs would reduce unnecessary MHP wastage while preventing more dangerous and expensive cases of toxic shock syndrome.<sup>16</sup>

## Next Steps

To unite a lobbying effort for menstrual rights in prison, Cornell University organizations like Women's Resource Center, the F Word, and the Public Service Center should organize campus petition signing and ask the university president for an endorsement. At the same time, students should collaborate with state and national organizations like the Women in Prison Project and Women's Prison Association to spread awareness of women's menstrual needs on social media and local forums. With enough signatures, their petition can influence members of the New York State Assembly Committee of Correction to write a menstrual prison bill.<sup>17</sup> The bill should propose that DOCCS purchase appropriate MHPs for prisoners and establish a system verifying the effectiveness of employees' weekly MHP distributions. Another valuable addition in the bill-writing process would be New York State Representative Carolyn Maloney, who formulated a bill for the National Institute of Health to research MHP health effects.<sup>18</sup>

## End Notes

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<sup>7</sup> "Menstrual Cycle: What's Normal, What's Not." Mayo Clinic. May 11, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/womens-health/in-depth/menstrual-cycle/art-20047186>.

<sup>8</sup> Jeltsen, Melissa. "Disturbing Report Finds New York's Female Prisoners Illegally Shackled During Labor." The Huffington Post. February 12, 2015. Accessed November 13, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/12/shackling-new-york\\_n\\_6665600.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/12/shackling-new-york_n_6665600.html).

<sup>9</sup> Okamoto, Nadya. "Menstrual Hygiene: The Dark Horse of Development." Harvard Political Review. September 06, 2016. Accessed November 13, 2016.

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# Prioritizing Art Therapy as a Mental Health Solution for Virginia's Veterans

By Liam Timmons, Roosevelt @ George Mason University

## Thesis

Virginia's General Assembly should implement and subsidize art therapy programs to reduce veterans' dependence on mental health services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

## Background Analysis

United States military veterans have a long history with mental illness. Soldiers returning from deployment have high rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Of more than 100,000 soldiers returning from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), more than 25 percent received mental health diagnoses; of those, 56 percent received two or more distinct mental health diagnoses.<sup>1</sup> However, beyond diagnosis, mental health services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are drastically underutilized. Long lines, a lack of funding, and more contribute to an environment that cannot care for veterans in need. According to a report from the White House, "the problems inherent within [the VA] are exacerbated by poor management and communication structures, distrust between employees and management, a history of retaliation toward employees raising issues, and a lack of accountability across all grade levels."<sup>2</sup> This results in only 9.5 percent of newly diagnosed veterans receiving the appropriate amount of mental health treatment through the VA.<sup>3</sup> The importance of a rapid response to this problem cannot be understated. Although they represent only 8.5 percent of the US population, veterans account for 18 percent of all suicides in America, with 20 veterans committing suicide each day.<sup>4</sup> Art therapy, defined as "psychological use of art media and the creative process, facilitated by an art therapist, to help foster self expression, create coping skills, and strengthen sense of self" offers an alternative to traditional counseling programs that has proven effective in treating myriad mental health disorders.<sup>5</sup> By combining general psychological processes such as cognitive working-through and relaxation with nonverbal and creative processes, art therapy provides a solution to the unique mental health needs of veterans.<sup>6</sup> In a 35-study meta-analysis, researchers at Marylhurst University found significant benefits from this approach for incarcerated men and veterans, both of whom face challenges to mental health treatment because of the masculine, therapy-resistant nature of their environments.<sup>7</sup>

## KEY FACTS

- Of the 1.7 million veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, 300,000 (20 percent) suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression.<sup>20</sup>
- According to the Army, only 40 percent of veterans who screen positive for serious emotional problems seek help from a mental health professional.<sup>21</sup>
- Art therapy has been clinically proven to reduce PTSD symptoms, and can be as much as 50 percent less costly than traditional counseling methods.<sup>22,23</sup>
- Virginia has the seventh highest veteran population in the country at nearly 800,000, over a quarter of whom utilize VA health care services.<sup>24</sup>

## Talking Points

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs does not have the infrastructure necessary to handle the mental health needs of veterans.<sup>8</sup>
2. Art therapy is an effective form of counseling for those with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and more.<sup>9</sup>
3. If introduced in Virginia, art therapy can reach veterans where traditional therapy cannot by breaking down the hyper-masculine, therapy-resistant military culture surrounding mental health issues.<sup>10</sup>

## Policy Idea

The Virginia General Assembly should implement and subsidize art therapy programs for veterans. Art therapy programs should be offered as alternatives to the VA's current mental health programs, for free or at a reduced charge. These programs should be offered in a group setting and designed as alternatives to traditional mental health care solutions that ignore the prevailing attitude of resistance and masculinity surrounding veterans' mental health.

## Policy Analysis

This policy would combat many of the issues surrounding mental health care for veterans. Art therapy has been clinically proven to treat a number of mental health disorders across a wide range of demographics. A study of 29 inpatient adolescents diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) found a significant reduction in trauma symptoms and "a trend in the reduction of behavioral incidents and seclusions."<sup>11</sup> Additionally, in a study of 85 children and adolescents, patients receiving the Chapman Art Therapy Treatment Intervention showed fewer PTSD symptoms after one month of treatment than did those receiving standard hospital care.<sup>12</sup> Unlike many other mental health treatment options, art therapy provides an alternative approach to counseling that is effective in removing barriers to treatment faced by veterans. Although the therapy-resistant and strongly masculine culture within the military normally makes it difficult for counselors to develop therapeutic relations with veterans, such resistance can be overcome in the creative atmosphere of an art therapy group.<sup>13</sup> Art therapy, unlike many other mental health solutions, is usually offered in a group setting and makes veterans more comfortable working through their mental health issues in the presence of other veterans.

Although not necessary for most states, licensing art therapists specifically as opposed to general professional counselors would increase the legitimacy and ease of access to art therapy for veterans. As most group therapy programs are on par with or cheaper than individual therapy, funding for these programs and their subsidization would be well within the scope of the almost \$40 million General Fund of the Virginia Office of Veterans and Defense Affairs.<sup>14,15</sup> Many veterans already qualify for free or low-cost VA health care services because of a service-connected condition or other factors. Veterans with health insurance can use it to supplement their VA benefits.<sup>16</sup> As the VA already covers treatment for any number of service-related conditions, a simple expansion of treatment methods would not be an issue. With nearly 800,000 veterans living in Virginia, it is critical that the Virginia General Assembly explore effective, low-cost forms of mental health treatment for them.<sup>17</sup>

### Next Steps

Implementing this proposal would require support from the Virginia General Assembly in addition to veterans groups and associations of mental health specialists. Robert B. Bell in the Virginia House and R. Creigh Deeds in the state Senate are potential allies in the legislature as they are both vice-chairs of the Joint Subcommittee to Study Mental Health Services in the 21st Century.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the VA would have to be convinced to give up some measure of control over the health services of veterans. Advocating for statelevel change must include veterans groups in the area, such as the Virginia Veterans Services Foundation and the Northern Virginia Veterans Association. Additionally, the Virginia Art Therapy Association would be a key part of this coalition, because it has drafted a bill, created an advocacy campaign, and is already in talks with at least one senator to pass licensure legislation.<sup>19</sup>

### End Notes

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# *Cleaning up our Drinking Water: the Case for Banning Triclocarban and Triclosan*

By Christopher Chang, *Roosevelt @ Cornell*

## Thesis

Triclocarban and triclosan are antimicrobial compounds found in products ranging from writing utensils to toothpaste. They have negative effects on human health, drinking water, and ecosystem processes. There should be a federal ban on their use in general consumer products.

## Background Analysis

The demand for antimicrobial chemicals in the U.S. has been rising over the course of the past two decades and is projected to continue to increase<sup>1</sup> in coming years, driven by an increase in public awareness of foodborne illnesses.<sup>2,3</sup> As a result, antimicrobial compounds, specifically triclocarban and triclosan, are found increasingly in oral hygiene products, makeup, kitchenware, clothing, and even calculators.<sup>4</sup> Since they are so ubiquitous, consumer exposure is high, and large amounts enter wastewater treatment plants via human urine or greywater, which is household wastewater excluding toilet discharge (including wastewater from showers, sinks, and washing machines).

In the U.S., wastewater treatment plants discharge approximately  $1.1 \times 10^5$  to  $4.2 \times 10^6$  kg of triclosan into the environment.<sup>7</sup> The compound has been known to alter the ecologies of soils<sup>8,9,10</sup> and freshwater ecosystems,<sup>11,12</sup> has been found in these environments<sup>13</sup> at concentrations that are toxic to algae,<sup>14</sup> and has been detected in 58 percent of freshwater streams in the U.S.<sup>15</sup> Further, it is an endocrine disruptor,<sup>16</sup> has been found in human breast milk,<sup>17</sup> disrupts thyroid action, drives antibiotic resistance,<sup>18</sup> and has potential neurotoxic effects.<sup>19</sup> Triclocarban, as a triclosan analog, exhibits a similar antimicrobial chemical mechanism of action. These negative effects led the FDA to ban the use of these chemicals in hand and body washes in September 2016. Banning them in these products, while a good first step, does not address the problem, nor the antibiotic resistance and human health problems associated with exposure to these chemicals in other products.

## Talking Points

- The widespread use of triclosan and triclocarban leads to antibiotic resistance, which is associated with increased mortality, particularly in individuals with chronic illnesses.
- Triclosan and triclocarban pollute drinking water and lead to human health issues. They are endocrine disruptors, potential neurotoxins, and are also toxic to aquatic organisms.
- The ubiquity of triclosan and triclocarban leads to increased costs in health care, loss of productivity, and the loss of environmental resources.

## KEY FACTS

- The ban on triclosan and triclocarban would save millions of dollars in health care and lost productivity fees associated with antimicrobial resistance every year.
- This ban would ensure environmental resources and drinking water sources are protected.
- If these compounds were banned, important fisheries would be protected in the long run from hormonal imbalances and breeding problems, livestock would be healthier and more productive, and there would be fewer losses from disease.
- The ban would only have short-term effects on the large corporations that produce products that contain these chemicals. Companies would have time (approximately one year) to adapt and change their practices.



## Policy Idea

The widespread usage of triclocarban and triclosan has no long-term benefits. Eradicating them completely from general consumer products would be beneficial to human health and help mitigate environmental issues such as endocrine disruption in freshwater fish. Thus, they should be banned in all general consumer products. There is a precedent for a similar national ban, with the FDA's ban in 2016. There should be an initial focus on local legislation, which can help push federal legislation toward the ultimate goal of a national ban on these chemicals.

## Policy Analysis

According to the WHO, antibiotic resistance is “one of the biggest threats to global health, food security, and development today.”<sup>20</sup> The widespread presence of triclosan and triclocarban in drinking water and soils and exposure to these compounds makes them particularly significant as drivers of antibiotic resistance. Antibiotic resistance has made treating serious infections in hospitals increasingly difficult<sup>21</sup> and affects the most vulnerable in society: cancer patients, people with rheumatoid arthritis, people who undergo dialysis treatment, and organ transplant recipients.<sup>22</sup> Antibiotic resistance is also associated with the increased spread of diseases leading to the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans each year.<sup>23</sup> According to the CDC, health care costs stemming from antibiotic resistance are approximately \$20 billion a year, with an additional \$35 billion a year in lost productivity.<sup>24</sup> Triclosan is also highly toxic at the bottom of aquatic food chains, which can have long-term effects on fisheries and freshwater productivity.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, access to clean drinking water is associated with positive economic growth.<sup>26</sup> Protecting freshwater resources from triclosan and triclocarban pollution thus has multiple economic benefits. The consequences of inaction are immense. Failing to ban these chemicals will cause us to mismanage natural resources, experience the associated long-run economic consequences, and directly increase the risk of mortality for many Americans. Banning these chemicals would address all of these problems at their source. A scaled-back policy approach would mitigate the negative effects to some degree, but not as much as a ban would.

## Next Steps

On a federal level, the FDA could propose and issue a final rule to ban triclosan and triclocarban nationally. Because they negatively impact society as a whole, it is important to organize the community and lobby local and national governments. This ban would also benefit marginalized communities who are victimized by environmental racism and lack access to clean drinking water. Thus, it is also important to involve groups such as the National Congress of American Indians, which is an organization that has a history of advocating for improving drinking water potability for Native Americans. The key targets of this policy are to eliminate triclosan and/or triclocarban in as many products and regions as possible. Individuals should write to their relevant representative or senator in support of the ban. If these compounds are banned at the state level, there will be greater grounds for a federal ban.

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# Moving Beyond Coal: Using a Carbon Tax to Train Coal Workers and Jobs

By Brian McDermott, *Roosevelt @ American*

## Thesis

The federal government should implement a carbon tax to bring an end to coal production, and to fund higher education for laid-off coal workers and a temporary jobs program that will employ former fossil fuel workers in a national service program.

## Background Analysis

When it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel.<sup>1</sup> The extraction and burning of coal is both environmentally and socioeconomically unsustainable; strip mining leads to deforestation and the wreckage of ecosystems.<sup>2</sup> As climate change leads to a global public health crisis, rapidly rising sea levels, deeply severe natural disasters, and an exacerbation of hunger and war, a moral and economic duty exists to end the use of coal energy.

Beyond its environmental impacts, coal is a dying industry. Feeling pressure from stricter regulations, cheap natural gas, and rapidly falling renewable energy prices, the coal industry is in decline. Regardless of government regulations and taxing, the industry is struggling to compete with other energy producers. Coal jobs have been disappearing for decades and will further decline as mines shut down and coal companies file for bankruptcy. This leaves thousands of low-skill workers unemployed. Removing low-skill coal workers from their jobs and telling them to fend for themselves in the midst of small labor markets and poorly diversified economies is not an option either. Only 3 percent of coal workers have a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, this need not be a choice between bad and worse. Both of these issues can be addressed and lead to a stronger economy and a stronger America.

## Talking Points

- Economists agree that a carbon tax is the most effective way to address the urgent challenge of climate change.<sup>4</sup>
- Free community college in particular has been implemented successfully in Tennessee, but instead of funding it through lottery reserves and other allocations as it is there, a national policy could be funded by a tax on the detrimental actions of the fossil fuel industry.<sup>5</sup>
- Similar to the revolutionary Public Works Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps of the New Deal era, a national service program could put fossil fuel workers in good-paying jobs that dramatically strengthen our country.

## KEY FACTS

- According to the Obama administration, by the beginning of the next decade approximately 1/3 of all jobs will require at least some college, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree.<sup>10</sup>
- The New York Times reports that major energy companies could benefit from a carbon tax because it would force utilities to buy more of their natural gas.
- The Brookings Institution finds that between 1987 and 2004, the number of coal industry jobs declined by more than 50%.

## Policy Idea

The federal government should impose a carbon tax on fossil fuel companies. Beginning the carbon tax at \$25 per ton of CO<sub>2</sub> and gradually increasing it would likely end all coal production around 2040.<sup>6</sup> The revenue gathered from this tax would be used to pay for two programs. The first would allow laid-off fossil fuel workers to attend community college or a technical skill retraining program for free. The other would be a temporary jobs program that would hire these unemployed workers to conduct service projects.

## Policy Analysis

Economists agree that a carbon tax is the most effective way to combat climate change. This is largely because it is a market-based policy, allowing free markets to operate without the constraints of regulations while gradually shifting energy sources from fossil fuels to renewables. As fossil fuel companies pay more in taxes, consumers feeling the cost will be encouraged to reduce their carbon consumption and shift to more sustainable lifestyle choices. According to a CBO analysis from 2013, a carbon tax that begins at \$25 per ton of CO<sub>2</sub> and increases by 2 percent each year would generate \$90 billion in its first year and \$1.06 trillion over the first 10 years.<sup>7</sup> When considering how to spend that revenue, using it to support former fossil fuel workers would be wise.

Since 1987, the number of coal industry jobs has been cut in half. This is particularly difficult because coal miners are paid well (\$1,492 per week on average), yet few have more than a high school education.<sup>8</sup> This means that the job opportunities are limited for laid-off coal workers, and to the extent that there are employment opportunities available, they will likely not pay as well as the coal mines.

Funding community college educations for these laid-off workers would be relatively cheap. The state government of Tennessee gives students an average of \$971 in addition to Pell Grants and other scholarships to completely fund their education.<sup>9</sup>

With the revenue that the carbon tax would bring in, every former coal miner who wants a job could get one working for a national service program. Similar to AmeriCorps, employees could choose how best to utilize their skills to assist with education, disaster relief, environmental protection, health care, or another form of service. As they are in the program, they would have the option to attend all-expenses-paid community college before entering into a new career path.

## Next Steps

A bill of this magnitude would require the strong support of environmental advocacy groups and state politicians where the fossil fuel industry is dominant. Gathering the support of groups like the Sierra Club and Environmental Defense Fund is important to gaining credibility. Furthermore, it is important for politicians representing fossil fuel-dominated states to support the bill. Lobbying efforts should be directed at members of Congress such as Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown and West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin. This support should be coupled with leaders on current climate policy like Senators Bernie Sanders and Ed Markey.

## End Notes

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# Lowering Livery Vehicle Emissions: The Taxi Industry as a Model for Uber and Lyft

By Caravaggio Canigalia, *Roosevelt @ Columbia*

## Thesis

New York City should impose caps on the number of vehicles that can be operated at any given time by ride-sharing companies such as Uber and Lyft. In conjunction, tax incentives, vouchers, and driver and company privileges should be used to encourage the taxi vehicle fleet as well as the ride-sharing companies to lower their share of carbon emissions.

## Background Analysis

Medallions are required licensing for all taxis in some cities in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Medallions are owned by individuals who buy them as long-term investments, and medallion owners receive leases from operators of their cars. These medallions were introduced in the 1920s and 1930s as a way of “cleaning up” the taxi industry.<sup>2</sup> By limiting the number of medallions available and thus the number of taxis on the road, cities like New York and Chicago reduced the competition between individual drivers, resulting in safer and less congested streets, and incentivizing medallion owners to choose reliable drivers.

By evading taxicab regulations and creating ride-sharing options, companies like Uber and Lyft have lowered prices significantly for consumers and, in some cases, made treatment of customers from impoverished areas of cities more equitable.<sup>3</sup> Because only a limited number of taxi medallions are available in New York, the number of Uber drivers in the city has ballooned past the number of active taxis in the New York fleet.<sup>4</sup> While this arguably makes Uber even more convenient than a taxi, it also means an increased number of livery vehicles on the road in New York at any given time serving roughly the same number of potential customers as earlier in the decade. This results in increased carbon emissions and traffic congestion.<sup>5</sup>

## Talking Points

- Incentives exist for increasing fuel efficiency and electric vehicle (EV) numbers in the New York taxi fleet.<sup>6</sup> These incentives are non-existent for Uber and Lyft.
- Taxis are quickly becoming obsolete, making former Mayor Bloomberg’s plans for decreasing the New York taxi fleet’s emissions less impactful.
- Creating a driver quota for companies like Uber and Lyft and incentives for lowering carbon emissions would assist the dying taxi industry while using it as a model for incentivizing the use of greener vehicles.

## KEY FACTS

- While the size of New York City’s cab fleet is 13,237<sup>9</sup>, there are more than 14,000 Uber drivers in the city.<sup>10</sup>
- The average taxi emits as much CO<sub>2</sub> per year as eight private cars.<sup>11</sup> Emission rates per shift are similar for Uber and Lyft.
- The city’s current taxi emissions plan would reduce taxi emissions by 18 percent by 2030<sup>12</sup>, but this is unimportant if taxis become uncompetitive.
- Per 12-hour shift, the average EV recharge costs \$5, while the average taxi refueling costs \$40<sup>13</sup>, so EV taxis save New York money.



## Policy Idea

New York City should cap the number of cars certain companies can have active in the city at any given time. The city should also require these companies to demonstrate their fleets' energy efficiency through both the promotion of ride-sharing options and the use of environmentally friendlier vehicles. Companies failing to meet emission requirements (based on taxi fleet emissions goals) over five-year periods would see a reduction in their allowed fleet capacity, while companies operating with even fewer emissions than required would be allowed to increase their fleet size, incentivizing greater use of hybrid cars and EVs in Uber and Lyft vehicle fleets. Such a policy should reduce vehicle emissions in New York City by even more than proposed taxi upgrades in the next 15 years.

## Policy Analysis

Since recharging an electric taxi is over 85 percent less costly than refueling an average New York taxi<sup>7</sup>, there is a clear incentive for New York City to support electric vehicle infrastructure (in particular charging stations). Since companies such as Uber and Lyft do not control the types of cars their drivers use, such an incentive does not exist for these companies. As the convenience of Uber and Lyft, combined with the cost-lowering ride-sharing option provided by these services, increasingly makes medallion taxi fleets obsolete in large cities, ensuring that livery vehicle emissions are lowered necessitates making taxis more competitive, incentivizing companies like Uber and Lyft to create emissions standards for their drivers, or both.

Creating a cap on the number of Uber or Lyft cars active at any given time in the city would decrease the number of vehicles on the road, reducing traffic congestion in New York. This in turn would result in lower emissions. Since the number of Uber or Lyft cars on the road directly affects the companies' ability to provide convenient service, they would have an incentive decrease their emissions in exchange for the ability to increase their market share. Additionally, taxi drivers and retired, medallion-owning former taxi drivers have been hurt financially by the proliferation of Uber and Lyft. (The cost of a medallion in New York City has fallen about 50 percent.)<sup>1</sup> Capping the number of cars operated by competitors would help soften the impact of the taxi industry's decline on small investors.

## Next Steps

The New York City Department of Motor Vehicles already runs routine emissions check on most vehicles in the city.<sup>8</sup> Along with the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, it could work to identify and enforce proper emissions standards and set guidelines for cap numbers on active vehicles from companies such as Uber and Lyft. This policy should appeal to the Taxi and Limousine Commission in particular due to its ability to decrease the newfound obsolescence of taxis in New York City. It should also appeal to the environmentally minded efforts of the De Blasio administration to reduce emissions and the urban heat island effect in New York. In order to implement this policy, crafting company descriptions to tailor environmental incentives to target companies like Uber and Lyft would be necessary. Since New York City controls its taxis and Uber and Lyft are cutting into taxi markets and emissions targets, finding support should not be difficult.



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# *Cleaning up our Drinking Water: the Case for Banning Triclocarban and Triclosan*

By Christopher Chang, *Roosevelt @ Cornell*

## Thesis

Triclocarban and triclosan are antimicrobial compounds found in products ranging from writing utensils to toothpaste. They have negative effects on human health, drinking water, and ecosystem processes. There should be a federal ban on their use in general consumer products.

## Background Analysis

The demand for antimicrobial chemicals in the U.S. has been rising over the course of the past two decades and is projected to continue to increase<sup>1</sup> in coming years, driven by an increase in public awareness of foodborne illnesses.<sup>2,3</sup> As a result, antimicrobial compounds, specifically triclocarban and triclosan, are found increasingly in oral hygiene products, makeup, kitchenware, clothing, and even calculators.<sup>4</sup> Since they are so ubiquitous, consumer exposure is high, and large amounts enter wastewater treatment plants via human urine or greywater, which is household wastewater excluding toilet discharge (including wastewater from showers, sinks, and washing machines).

In the U.S., wastewater treatment plants discharge approximately  $1.1 \times 10^5$  to  $4.2 \times 10^6$  kg of triclosan into the environment.<sup>7</sup> The compound has been known to alter the ecologies of soils<sup>8,9,10</sup> and freshwater ecosystems,<sup>11,12</sup> has been found in these environments<sup>13</sup> at concentrations that are toxic to algae,<sup>14</sup> and has been detected in 58 percent of freshwater streams in the U.S.<sup>15</sup> Further, it is an endocrine disruptor,<sup>16</sup> has been found in human breast milk,<sup>17</sup> disrupts thyroid action, drives antibiotic resistance,<sup>18</sup> and has potential neurotoxic effects.<sup>19</sup> Triclocarban, as a triclosan analog, exhibits a similar antimicrobial chemical mechanism of action. These negative effects led the FDA to ban the use of these chemicals in hand and body washes in September 2016. Banning them in these products, while a good first step, does not address the problem, nor the antibiotic resistance and human health problems associated with exposure to these chemicals in other products.

## Talking Points

- The widespread use of triclosan and triclocarban leads to antibiotic resistance, which is associated with increased mortality, particularly in individuals with chronic illnesses.
- Triclosan and triclocarban pollute drinking water and lead to human health issues. They are endocrine disruptors, potential neurotoxins, and are also toxic to aquatic organisms.
- The ubiquity of triclosan and triclocarban leads to increased costs in health care, loss of productivity, and the loss of environmental resources.

## KEY FACTS

- The ban on triclosan and triclocarban would save millions of dollars in health care and lost productivity fees associated with antimicrobial resistance every year.
- This ban would ensure environmental resources and drinking water sources are protected.
- If these compounds were banned, important fisheries would be protected in the long run from hormonal imbalances and breeding problems, livestock would be healthier and more productive, and there would be fewer losses from disease.
- The ban would only have short-term effects on the large corporations that produce products that contain these chemicals. Companies would have time (approximately one year) to adapt and change their practices.

## Policy Idea

The widespread usage of triclocarban and triclosan has no long-term benefits. Eradicating them completely from general consumer products would be beneficial to human health and help mitigate environmental issues such as endocrine disruption in freshwater fish. Thus, they should be banned in all general consumer products. There is a precedent for a similar national ban, with the FDA's ban in 2016. There should be an initial focus on local legislation, which can help push federal legislation toward the ultimate goal of a national ban on these chemicals.

## Policy Analysis

According to the WHO, antibiotic resistance is “one of the biggest threats to global health, food security, and development today.”<sup>20</sup> The widespread presence of triclosan and triclocarban in drinking water and soils and exposure to these compounds makes them particularly significant as drivers of antibiotic resistance. Antibiotic resistance has made treating serious infections in hospitals increasingly difficult<sup>21</sup> and affects the most vulnerable in society: cancer patients, people with rheumatoid arthritis, people who undergo dialysis treatment, and organ transplant recipients.<sup>22</sup> Antibiotic resistance is also associated with the increased spread of diseases leading to the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans each year.<sup>23</sup> According to the CDC, health care costs stemming from antibiotic resistance are approximately \$20 billion a year, with an additional \$35 billion a year in lost productivity.<sup>24</sup> Triclosan is also highly toxic at the bottom of aquatic food chains, which can have long-term effects on fisheries and freshwater productivity.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, access to clean drinking water is associated with positive economic growth.<sup>26</sup> Protecting freshwater resources from triclosan and triclocarban pollution thus has multiple economic benefits. The consequences of inaction are immense. Failing to ban these chemicals will cause us to mismanage natural resources, experience the associated long-run economic consequences, and directly increase the risk of mortality for many Americans. Banning these chemicals would address all of these problems at their source. A scaled-back policy approach would mitigate the negative effects to some degree, but not as much as a ban would.

## Next Steps

On a federal level, the FDA could propose and issue a final rule to ban triclosan and triclocarban nationally. Because they negatively impact society as a whole, it is important to organize the community and lobby local and national governments. This ban would also benefit marginalized communities who are victimized by environmental racism and lack access to clean drinking water. Thus, it is also important to involve groups such as the National Congress of American Indians, which is an organization that has a history of advocating for improving drinking water potability for Native Americans. The key targets of this policy are to eliminate triclosan and/or triclocarban in as many products and regions as possible. Individuals should write to their relevant representative or senator in support of the ban. If these compounds are banned at the state level, there will be greater grounds for a federal ban.

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# Moving Beyond Coal: Using a Carbon Tax to Train Coal Workers and Jobs

By Brian McDermott, *Roosevelt @ American*

## Thesis

The federal government should implement a carbon tax to bring an end to coal production, and to fund higher education for laid-off coal workers and a temporary jobs program that will employ former fossil fuel workers in a national service program.

## Background Analysis

When it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel.<sup>1</sup> The extraction and burning of coal is both environmentally and socioeconomically unsustainable; strip mining leads to deforestation and the wreckage of ecosystems.<sup>2</sup> As climate change leads to a global public health crisis, rapidly rising sea levels, deeply severe natural disasters, and an exacerbation of hunger and war, a moral and economic duty exists to end the use of coal energy.

Beyond its environmental impacts, coal is a dying industry. Feeling pressure from stricter regulations, cheap natural gas, and rapidly falling renewable energy prices, the coal industry is in decline. Regardless of government regulations and taxing, the industry is struggling to compete with other energy producers. Coal jobs have been disappearing for decades and will further decline as mines shut down and coal companies file for bankruptcy. This leaves thousands of low-skill workers unemployed. Removing low-skill coal workers from their jobs and telling them to fend for themselves in the midst of small labor markets and poorly diversified economies is not an option either. Only 3 percent of coal workers have a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, this need not be a choice between bad and worse. Both of these issues can be addressed and lead to a stronger economy and a stronger America.

## Talking Points

- Economists agree that a carbon tax is the most effective way to address the urgent challenge of climate change.<sup>4</sup>
- Free community college in particular has been implemented successfully in Tennessee, but instead of funding it through lottery reserves and other allocations as it is there, a national policy could be funded by a tax on the detrimental actions of the fossil fuel industry.<sup>5</sup>
- Similar to the revolutionary Public Works Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps of the New Deal era, a national service program could put fossil fuel workers in good-paying jobs that dramatically strengthen our country.

## KEY FACTS

- According to the Obama administration, by the beginning of the next decade approximately 1/3 of all jobs will require at least some college, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree.<sup>10</sup>
- The New York Times reports that major energy companies could benefit from a carbon tax because it would force utilities to buy more of their natural gas.
- The Brookings Institution finds that between 1987 and 2004, the number of coal industry jobs declined by more than 50%.



## Policy Idea

The federal government should impose a carbon tax on fossil fuel companies. Beginning the carbon tax at \$25 per ton of CO<sub>2</sub> and gradually increasing it would likely end all coal production around 2040.<sup>6</sup> The revenue gathered from this tax would be used to pay for two programs. The first would allow laid-off fossil fuel workers to attend community college or a technical skill retraining program for free. The other would be a temporary jobs program that would hire these unemployed workers to conduct service projects.

## Policy Analysis

Economists agree that a carbon tax is the most effective way to combat climate change. This is largely because it is a market-based policy, allowing free markets to operate without the constraints of regulations while gradually shifting energy sources from fossil fuels to renewables. As fossil fuel companies pay more in taxes, consumers feeling the cost will be encouraged to reduce their carbon consumption and shift to more sustainable lifestyle choices. According to a CBO analysis from 2013, a carbon tax that begins at \$25 per ton of CO<sub>2</sub> and increases by 2 percent each year would generate \$90 billion in its first year and \$1.06 trillion over the first 10 years.<sup>7</sup> When considering how to spend that revenue, using it to support former fossil fuel workers would be wise.

Since 1987, the number of coal industry jobs has been cut in half. This is particularly difficult because coal miners are paid well (\$1,492 per week on average), yet few have more than a high school education.<sup>8</sup> This means that the job opportunities are limited for laid-off coal workers, and to the extent that there are employment opportunities available, they will likely not pay as well as the coal mines.

Funding community college educations for these laid-off workers would be relatively cheap. The state government of Tennessee gives students an average of \$971 in addition to Pell Grants and other scholarships to completely fund their education.<sup>9</sup>

With the revenue that the carbon tax would bring in, every former coal miner who wants a job could get one working for a national service program. Similar to AmeriCorps, employees could choose how best to utilize their skills to assist with education, disaster relief, environmental protection, health care, or another form of service. As they are in the program, they would have the option to attend all-expenses-paid community college before entering into a new career path.

## Next Steps

A bill of this magnitude would require the strong support of environmental advocacy groups and state politicians where the fossil fuel industry is dominant. Gathering the support of groups like the Sierra Club and Environmental Defense Fund is important to gaining credibility. Furthermore, it is important for politicians representing fossil fuel-dominated states to support the bill. Lobbying efforts should be directed at members of Congress such as Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown and West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin. This support should be coupled with leaders on current climate policy like Senators Bernie Sanders and Ed Markey.

## End Notes

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# Lowering Livery Vehicle Emissions: The Taxi Industry as a Model for Uber and Lyft

By Caravaggio Canigalia, *Roosevelt @ Columbia*

## Thesis

New York City should impose caps on the number of vehicles that can be operated at any given time by ride-sharing companies such as Uber and Lyft. In conjunction, tax incentives, vouchers, and driver and company privileges should be used to encourage the taxi vehicle fleet as well as the ride-sharing companies to lower their share of carbon emissions.

## Background Analysis

Medallions are required licensing for all taxis in some cities in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Medallions are owned by individuals who buy them as long-term investments, and medallion owners receive leases from operators of their cars. These medallions were introduced in the 1920s and 1930s as a way of “cleaning up” the taxi industry.<sup>2</sup> By limiting the number of medallions available and thus the number of taxis on the road, cities like New York and Chicago reduced the competition between individual drivers, resulting in safer and less congested streets, and incentivizing medallion owners to choose reliable drivers.

By evading taxicab regulations and creating ride-sharing options, companies like Uber and Lyft have lowered prices significantly for consumers and, in some cases, made treatment of customers from impoverished areas of cities more equitable.<sup>3</sup> Because only a limited number of taxi medallions are available in New York, the number of Uber drivers in the city has ballooned past the number of active taxis in the New York fleet.<sup>4</sup> While this arguably makes Uber even more convenient than a taxi, it also means an increased number of livery vehicles on the road in New York at any given time serving roughly the same number of potential customers as earlier in the decade. This results in increased carbon emissions and traffic congestion.<sup>5</sup>

## Talking Points

- Incentives exist for increasing fuel efficiency and electric vehicle (EV) numbers in the New York taxi fleet.<sup>6</sup> These incentives are non-existent for Uber and Lyft.
- Taxis are quickly becoming obsolete, making former Mayor Bloomberg’s plans for decreasing the New York taxi fleet’s emissions less impactful.
- Creating a driver quota for companies like Uber and Lyft and incentives for lowering carbon emissions would assist the dying taxi industry while using it as a model for incentivizing the use of greener vehicles.

## KEY FACTS

- While the size of New York City’s cab fleet is 13,237<sup>9</sup>, there are more than 14,000 Uber drivers in the city.<sup>10</sup>
- The average taxi emits as much CO<sub>2</sub> per year as eight private cars.<sup>11</sup> Emission rates per shift are similar for Uber and Lyft.
- The city’s current taxi emissions plan would reduce taxi emissions by 18 percent by 2030<sup>12</sup>, but this is unimportant if taxis become uncompetitive.
- Per 12-hour shift, the average EV recharge costs \$5, while the average taxi refueling costs \$40<sup>13</sup>, so EV taxis save New York money.

## Policy Idea

New York City should cap the number of cars certain companies can have active in the city at any given time. The city should also require these companies to demonstrate their fleets' energy efficiency through both the promotion of ride-sharing options and the use of environmentally friendlier vehicles. Companies failing to meet emission requirements (based on taxi fleet emissions goals) over five-year periods would see a reduction in their allowed fleet capacity, while companies operating with even fewer emissions than required would be allowed to increase their fleet size, incentivizing greater use of hybrid cars and EVs in Uber and Lyft vehicle fleets. Such a policy should reduce vehicle emissions in New York City by even more than proposed taxi upgrades in the next 15 years.

## Policy Analysis

Since recharging an electric taxi is over 85 percent less costly than refueling an average New York taxi<sup>7</sup>, there is a clear incentive for New York City to support electric vehicle infrastructure (in particular charging stations). Since companies such as Uber and Lyft do not control the types of cars their drivers use, such an incentive does not exist for these companies. As the convenience of Uber and Lyft, combined with the cost-lowering ride-sharing option provided by these services, increasingly makes medallion taxi fleets obsolete in large cities, ensuring that livery vehicle emissions are lowered necessitates making taxis more competitive, incentivizing companies like Uber and Lyft to create emissions standards for their drivers, or both.

Creating a cap on the number of Uber or Lyft cars active at any given time in the city would decrease the number of vehicles on the road, reducing traffic congestion in New York. This in turn would result in lower emissions. Since the number of Uber or Lyft cars on the road directly affects the companies' ability to provide convenient service, they would have an incentive decrease their emissions in exchange for the ability to increase their market share. Additionally, taxi drivers and retired, medallion-owning former taxi drivers have been hurt financially by the proliferation of Uber and Lyft. (The cost of a medallion in New York City has fallen about 50 percent.)<sup>1</sup> Capping the number of cars operated by competitors would help soften the impact of the taxi industry's decline on small investors.

## Next Steps

The New York City Department of Motor Vehicles already runs routine emissions check on most vehicles in the city.<sup>8</sup> Along with the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, it could work to identify and enforce proper emissions standards and set guidelines for cap numbers on active vehicles from companies such as Uber and Lyft. This policy should appeal to the Taxi and Limousine Commission in particular due to its ability to decrease the newfound obsolescence of taxis in New York City. It should also appeal to the environmentally minded efforts of the De Blasio administration to reduce emissions and the urban heat island effect in New York. In order to implement this policy, crafting company descriptions to tailor environmental incentives to target companies like Uber and Lyft would be necessary. Since New York City controls its taxis and Uber and Lyft are cutting into taxi markets and emissions targets, finding support should not be difficult.

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# Increasing Virginia Voter Registration: Requiring Notification of Voter Application Denial

By Danielle Melton, *Roosevelt @ Mason*

## Thesis

Virginia should include phone number and email as required fields on all voter registration forms and require the Office of Elections in every city or county to use all available methods to notify applicants if their registration is denied.

## Background Analysis

Virginia residents are often unaware when their voter registration applications are denied because they are not notified. Under the system in place, successful applicants receive their voter cards in the mail and those deemed ineligible to register receive notice and information for filing a court appeal.<sup>1</sup> However, many people either do not have working mailing addresses or live in facilities that operate their own, privately run mail services, such as senior centers, apartment complexes, homeless shelters, and universities. Because these locations are not considered USPS Managed Service Points, it is impossible for the postal service (and thus the Office of Elections) to verify that a piece of mail is received by an individual, as opposed to their private mailroom operator.<sup>2</sup> As such, these populations are only able to check their registration status online.

Applicants who are computer illiterate, do not have access to the internet, or have their application processed close to or after the registration deadline may not discover until Election Day that they are unable to vote. This scenario also affects populations who live abroad and therefore have irregular access to their registered American address, those with disabilities, and those who have limited literacy and would be likely to fill out forms incorrectly or incompletely. If a form is left incomplete or is illegible, the application will be denied and a new form must be submitted. Several other states, such as Georgia<sup>3</sup> and Massachusetts,<sup>4</sup> have a version of denial notification; however, no state requires that notification be delivered by all means of contact listed on the application.

## Talking Points

- Requiring voter applicants to provide a phone number and email will make it easier to contact them if their registration is denied.
- Requiring the office of the registrar to use all contact methods listed on voter applications will help to ensure denied applicants are notified before they arrive at the polls.
- Knowledge of denial is necessary to restart the application process or appeal the denial in court.
- Rectifying this policy shortfall will bolster the ability of underrepresented communities to participate in the electoral process in Virginia.

## KEY FACTS

- In Virginia in 2012, a total of 40,946 voter registration applications were denied, amounting to 3.95 percent of all applications.<sup>7</sup>
- Neither phone number nor email is required on Virginia voter registration applications.<sup>8</sup>
- There is no current legal obligation for the Virginia registrar to contact denied applicants to notify them of their denial through phone or email even if listed.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2016, there was a 55 percent increase in applications in the month before the deadline from September to October.<sup>10</sup>

## Policy Idea

Virginia's General Assembly should amend Section 24.2-418 of the Code of Virginia to require that all applicants provide their phone number and email address when registering to vote, while still allowing the form to be processed if those fields are left incomplete. Additionally, Section 24.2-422 of the Code of Virginia should be amended to require that each Office of Elections notify applicants of their denial within 10 days through all available means of contact, and allow them to correct missing information over the phone.

## Policy Analysis

Adding a requirement of phone number and email, while still giving a "None" option for those who do not have an email or phone, will increase the likelihood of contact with a denied applicant. Those who are unreachable by conventional mail, such as students or seniors, will likely have a working home or cell phone number or email. Furthermore, most applications are submitted near the registration deadline,<sup>5</sup> meaning that the Office of Elections may not have time to review many of these applications until the deadline has passed and it is no longer possible to reapply. Informing last-minute applicants that their registration was denied and allowing them to amend information by phone will give them an opportunity to participate in the election.

Voter applications can be denied in the Commonwealth of Virginia for small details such as a missing middle name or a misspelled address, which prevents vulnerable populations with limited English or non-western name structures, or those who are differently abled, from registering. The current notification letter gives the options of court appeal or submitting a new form;<sup>6</sup> applicants from vulnerable populations in particular need to be made aware of their denial quickly and are more likely to resolve the issue if they can speak with someone from their Office of Elections. In a state like Virginia with elections every year, full knowledge of voter registration status and a fair denial notification process is crucial to upholding a fully representative democracy.

There is no system in place for the state to provide the funds for this policy; however, given that election laws are administrated on a local level, finding funding for these changes should be left to the county level.

## Next Steps

Organizations centered on voter rights and access to voting already exist within college campuses across Virginia. Creating coalitions of these groups would help bring awareness to this issue. A collective social media campaign carried out by the major parties of Virginia and nonpartisan voter registration focused groups such as Virginia 21 could bring this policy as well as the broader issue of disfranchisement of marginalized communities to the forefront of the state's political agenda. These groups could host a series of informational sessions and start a letter-writing campaign to Virginia delegates. Following advocacy and research of the issue, these coalitions could meet with lawmakers and urge them to personally voice their concern and push for the passage of this policy.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Code § 24.2-422

<sup>2</sup> "Managed Service Points." USPS.com® - Corporate News and Information. Accessed December 02, 2016. <https://about.usps.com/strategic-planning/cs02/2f3.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> 5 Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-220(d) (2015)

<sup>4</sup> Voter Registration. Publication no. 950 CMR 57. Office Of The Secretary Of The Commonwealth, Massachusetts.

<sup>5</sup> "2016 Registration Statistics." 2016 Registration Statistics | Virginia Department of Elections. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/registration-statistics/2016-registration-statistics/index.html>.

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<sup>7</sup> "Voter Registrations Denied for Incomplete Information." Voter Registrations Denied for Incomplete Information | Virginia Department of Elections. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/dataproject/VoterRegistrationDenied.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Code § 24.2-418

<sup>9</sup> Virginia Code § 24.2-422

<sup>10</sup> "2016 Registration Statistics." 2016 Registration Statistics | Virginia Department of Elections. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/registration-statistics/2016-registration-statistics/index.html>.

# Online Voter Registration in Michigan

By Christopher Olson, *Roosevelt @ U of Michigan*

## Thesis

The state of Michigan should allow citizens to register to vote online rather than requiring paper registration forms. This policy would save the state money and make registering to vote more convenient for Michigan residents.

## Background Analysis

Michigan once led the way in making it easier for people to register to vote, having introduced the policy of allowing citizens to register to vote in motor vehicle transactions.<sup>1</sup> Today however, online voter registration has become the most convenient way to register to vote. First introduced in Arizona in 2002, it has since been adopted by 32 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>23</sup> Recognizing the benefits of online voter registration, new states continue to adopt it. Per a 2011 survey 78 percent of US adults use the internet, with 18 to 29-year-olds using the internet at an even higher rate of 94 percent, thus putting voter registration online makes it available to great number of people.<sup>45</sup> This is particularly important in Michigan as a 2014 survey found that 28.8% of Michigan residents were not registered to vote.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-five percent of Michigan residents between the ages of 18 to 29 said they were not registered to vote, the highest of any age group. The survey data also shows differences in registration rates based on race, sex, and level of education.<sup>7</sup> Michigan residents can already change their registration address online and a state-wide registration data-base already exists. These systems could be modified to implement online voter registration.

## Talking Points

- Online registration systems are inexpensive to create and save money over paper registration systems
- Registration rates, especially among young people increase with convenient online voter registration.
- Online voter registration is secure, with no known security breaches and reduces the chance of fraud.

## Policy Idea

Michigan should allow citizens to register to vote online in addition to allowing them to change their registered voting address online. This will increase democratic access by making registering to vote easier. Additionally, Michigan can offer online registration in multiple languages and promote a link to register to vote on all websites run by the state of Michigan. Most importantly, Michigan can work with third parties, such as TurboVote, to allow them to register citizens to vote through the online system.

## KEY FACTS

- Maricopa County, Arizona has saved \$1.4 million since 2008 by promoting online voter registration.<sup>18</sup>
- With online voter registration Arizona saw a 9.5 percent increase in voter registration between 2002 and 2004.<sup>19</sup>
- Arizona found that its cost of processing a registration form went from 83 cents for a paper form to 3 cents for an online form.<sup>20</sup>



## Policy Analysis

Online voter registration systems cost very little to build: most states have spent less than \$300,000 to create their systems.<sup>8</sup> Arizona and Washington spent \$130,000 and \$279,000 respectively to implement their systems.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the cost savings over a paper system, are large, with states saving between \$0.50 and \$2.34 per transaction.<sup>10</sup> In 2012, California saved almost \$2 million dollars by implementing online voter registration.<sup>11</sup> Online registration systems are also less prone to errors and incomplete applications. Maricopa County, Arizona found five times less errors with online registration over paper.<sup>12</sup> Arizona also found after instituting online registration that registration rates among 18-to-24-year-olds rose from 28 percent to 53 percent.<sup>13</sup> Today, 70 percent of voter registration in Arizona takes place online and 94% of online registrants vote compared to 85 percent of those who registered under the old system.<sup>14</sup> For all the benefits of online voter registration legitimate concerns can be raised about the technological security of such a system. There have, however, been no known security breaches or cases of fraud to date.<sup>15</sup> Officials have also consistently confirmed that online registration reduces the opportunity for fraud.<sup>16</sup> Concerns have also been raised that online voter registration will not help all groups equally, reinforcing certain disparities in the electorate. To address this, Michigan should not require a signature on file as such a system is tied to driver's license access.<sup>17</sup>

## Next Steps

Instituting an online voter registration system would require a law to be passed by the Michigan legislature. The Michigan League of Women Voters and ACLU of Michigan would both be possible allies for lobbying the state legislature for the introduction and passage of such a bill as both organizations support expanding voting rights and making voting more convenient. In the Michigan senate, Assistant Senate Minority Leader Bieda, has already introduced a bill to implement online voter registration, senate bill 56, which has been referred to the elections committee in the senate but has not been reported on. Lobbying efforts should be focused around the passage of this bill. To ensure the passage of this bill however, bipartisan support will be needed as republican control the house, senate and governorship. Key to building this support will be raising awareness for this policy which can be done through op-eds in local newspapers.

## End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> "Online Voter Registration." Ncsl.org. June 14, 2016. Accessed November 25, 2016. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>.

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- <sup>11</sup> Ibid
- <sup>12</sup> Weiser, Wendy R., and Christopher Ponoroff. "Voter Registration in a Digital Age | Brennan Center for Justice." Voter Registration in a Digital Age | Brennan Center for Justice. July 13, 2010. Accessed November 25, 2016. <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/voter-registration-digital-age>.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid
- <sup>14</sup> Cobb, Rachael V. "The Many Benefits of Online Voter Registration." The Many Benefits of Online Voter Registration. July 2015. Accessed November 26, 2016. <http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/brief/many-benefits-online-voter-registration>.
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# *Fighting Young Voter Apathy: Automatic Voter Registration for College Students in Virginia*

By Evan Baines, Roosevelt @ Mason

## **Thesis**

Young people are statistically less likely to be registered to vote. The Commonwealth of Virginia should mandate that all state universities and community colleges provide automatic voter registration for students, thereby increasing voter registration and participation by young people.

## **Background Analysis**

The United States suffers from low voter turnout in elections. In particular, voters between the ages of 18 and 35 have much lower turnout rates than other age demographics. The current youth voting bloc, Millennials, is actually the largest living American generation. While the 69.7 million Baby Boomers make up the largest generation of eligible voters, Millennials are not far behind with 69.2 million eligible voters. Despite this, in 2012 only 46 percent of Millennials voted as opposed to 69 percent of Baby Boomers.<sup>1</sup> In Virginia, only 52 percent of 18- to 27-year-olds were registered to vote for the 2012 election, and only 47 percent of 18- to 27-year-olds reported voting.<sup>2</sup> Researchers chalk low turnout up to civic apathy among young people and the fact that voting is not a normative social behavior. Voter registration obstacles, like deadlines and procedures, have been shown to affect younger voter participation. In a study by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), 22 percent of young people said they did not register to vote because they missed the registration deadline, while another 6 percent said they did not know how to register.<sup>3</sup>

## **Talking Points**

- Millennials are the largest living American generation and 69.2 million of them are eligible to vote.<sup>4</sup>
- In Virginia, only 52 percent of 18- to 27-year-olds were registered to vote in the 2012 election, and only 47 percent voted.<sup>5</sup>
- Twenty-two percent of young people reported that they did not register to vote because they missed the registration deadline, and another 6 percent did not know how to register.<sup>6</sup>

## **Policy Idea**

In order to eliminate registration barriers for young people and foster civic engagement and voter participation, the Commonwealth of Virginia should require all of its public universities and community colleges to establish systems where its students are automatically registered to vote when they sign up for classes. The university or college should also provide an option for students to opt-out of the automated process. The legislation should mandate the state provide support for private educational institutions if

## **KEY FACTS**

- This registration program would reach approximately 389,364 students enrolled in public institutions of higher learning in Virginia.<sup>14</sup>
- Establishing an automatic registration system for college students in Virginia would be cost-effective and limit fraud and inconsistencies.
- Automated registration for students would foster habits of civic engagement and participation that could increase voter turnout rates in the future.
- California has successfully enacted legislation to mandate automatic voter registration systems at public institutions of higher learning.

they independently decide to join the automatic registration system.

## Policy Analysis

This proposed system would reach the approximately 389,364 students enrolled in public institutions for higher learning in Virginia<sup>7</sup>, providing them an opportunity to register online when they sign up for classes. This system would be similar to the “motor voter” mechanisms enacted by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993, which lowered registration costs<sup>8</sup> by requiring states to provide registration opportunities when eligible voters interact with certain state government entities.<sup>9</sup> An automated registration system for students would also lower the costs of registering. In 2016, the state of California adopted a similar policy through the Student Voter Act, which requires the state’s public universities and colleges to develop systems that allow enrolling students to submit a voter registration application to the California Secretary of State online.<sup>10</sup>

In response to recent concerns over possible fraud and application mistakes surrounding third party registration drives<sup>11</sup>, automated registration for students is a low-cost solution that establishes a uniform system of registering voters en masse. Civic participation and voting at a young age is crucial to developing life-long habits of civic engagement,<sup>12</sup> and the system proposed here facilitates and promotes engagement. To construct this system, there would be limited costs that include institutions redesigning their existing class registration platforms to include a registration questionnaire. However, an automated registration system for students would likely lower registration costs for the state<sup>13</sup> and would be consistent with the goal of maintaining a healthy, participatory democracy.

## Next Steps

At the university level, coalitions of student groups and allies throughout Virginia should grow grassroots support for this policy by networking and lobbying their respective administrative bodies, including university administrators and student government. While much of the major reform will fall under the purview of the Virginia legislature, these coalitions should work with their institutions in the meantime to develop systems that make it easier for students to register to vote, within what is allowed by law. These institutions’ systems will provide test cases and examples to help sway legislators. At George Mason University (Mason), the author will lobby the Student Senate to pass a resolution of support for an automated voter registration system, and do the same with the Faculty Senate and president of the university. The endorsement of these groups will be instrumental in building support in the Virginia General Assembly, which must approve the policy. The author will speak to state legislators including Delegate David Bulova and Senator J. Chapman Petersen, who represent Mason in the Virginia legislature. Once approved by the General Assembly, educational institutions will reform their online class registration systems to include a voter registration option for students.

## End Notes

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# Ending the Automatic Transfer of Juveniles to Adult Court in Connecticut

By Sarah Rakin, Sean Gutierrez, Enzo Cerrutti, Gerard Lanzano and Julia Keller, Roosevelt @ Connecticut College

## Thesis

In Connecticut, juveniles 15 and older who are charged with a Class A or B felony are automatically transferred to adult court.<sup>1</sup> The state should enact a change from automatic transfer to discretionary transfer in order to account for extenuating circumstances that surround juvenile crime.<sup>2</sup>

## Background Analysis

Individuals under 18 years of age are better served by the juvenile justice system because the juvenile system requires that educational services be provided, that the individual's record be sealed at the age of 18 (depending on the amount of time a case has been closed), and that juveniles not be subject to mandatory minimum sentencing laws. Staying in the juvenile system prevents young people from being sent to adult prisons, where they are at risk for much higher rates of sexual assault<sup>3</sup> and suicide attempts.<sup>4</sup>

Until 2007, Connecticut was one of only three states that treated 16-year-olds as adults. Although concern about this law grew in the 1990s, it remained unchanged because of national discourse on “law and order” and “being tough on crime.” By 2007, The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance successfully lobbied to bring 16- and 17-year-olds under the jurisdiction of the juvenile system as a result of the “Raise the Age” campaign. However, the caveat of automatic transfer in the case of a Class A or B felony remained. Currently, youth of color and low-income youth are the groups most affected by the law. In 2015, an equal amount of black and white children were arrested in Connecticut. Since black youth only make up 12 percent of the population, this means they were five times more likely to be arrested than white children.<sup>5</sup> Minority children are also more likely to be detained and for longer periods of time.<sup>6</sup>

## Talking Points

- Connecticut is one of only two states in the Northeast region that allows for automatic transfer without a waiver system.<sup>7</sup>
- The automatic transfer policy disproportionately affects non-white youth.
- Unlike juvenile courts, adult courts have mandatory minimum sentencing.
- Adult prisons systems do not provide educational services.

## KEY FACTS

- Young people prosecuted in the adult system are 34 times more likely to recidivate and commit more violent offenses than their peers in the juvenile system who are charged with the same type of crime. This remains true even if they only receive a sentence of probation.<sup>8</sup>
- Juveniles can receive community-based programming as an alternative to detention for an average cost of \$75 a day, a fifth of the cost of incarceration. Every dollar spent on evidence-based programs (i.e. multidimensional treatment foster care, multisystemic therapy) can yield up to \$13 in cost savings.<sup>9</sup>
- Black youth make up 62 percent of minors prosecuted in the adult system nationally and are nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence.<sup>20</sup>
- Minors can receive an adult criminal record and are consequently denied employment, educational opportunities, and housing, and can be barred from receiving student financial aid.<sup>21</sup>



## Policy Idea

No individual under 18 who has been arrested should be subject to an automatic transfer to adult court without being able to present an argument for why the juvenile court would better serve their needs. The juvenile justice system in Connecticut has a transfer process based on discretionary waivers for C, D, and unclassified felonies that should be applied to all felony classes. Discretionary waivers enable juvenile court judges to waive jurisdiction, if deemed necessary, in cases involving minors to allow prosecution to continue in adult court. The juvenile court must conduct a hearing in which all parties are able to present evidence relevant to the waiver issue.<sup>8</sup> This includes any evidence that would suggest that the best interests of the child and the public would be better served by a juvenile court.

## Policy Analysis

In Connecticut, approximately 200 minors are transferred to adult court each year.<sup>9</sup> On average, this group is 53.2 percent black, 26.6 percent Hispanic, and 19.7 percent white.<sup>10</sup> The racial disparity indicates that crimes are being committed and prosecuted at different rates because of structural inequality. While a few of these minors may constitute a real threat to public safety and require secure detention, the great majority would benefit more from the juvenile system and the rehabilitative services it provides.<sup>11</sup> If convicted in adult court, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the effects of stigmatization and feelings of resentment and injustice.<sup>12</sup> Even worse, if sent to adult prison, (pre- or post- trial) young people are much more vulnerable to sexual assault<sup>13</sup> and feelings of social isolation and depression, and are 36 times more likely to commit suicide.<sup>14</sup> After being released, the negative effects of a criminal record follow them, which makes it significantly more difficult to find employment or housing. The culmination of these factors leads to higher rates of recidivism. Therefore, the state is actually creating a threat to public safety by imposing such punitive measures.

Economically, we predict that this policy will have similar effects to the “Raise the Age” policy, which was approved in 2007. After Connecticut redefined “juveniles” to include 16- and 17-year-olds, the state spent less on the juvenile justice system than it had 10 years prior.<sup>15</sup> The state actually spent \$12 million less than it had budgeted for reform.<sup>16</sup> Since the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who enter the system each year is much greater than the 200 adolescents sent to adult court, the budget would not substantially increase. Community-based programming has been proven to yield lower costs in both the short and long term compared to incarceration.<sup>17</sup> Lower rates of recidivism will reduce costs for the state in the long term, and individuals who do not reoffend are more likely to gain employment, thus generating tax revenue.

## Next Steps

The Connecticut General Assembly must be lobbied. Specifically, we intend to lobby the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, a group that has already made significant strides in improving Connecticut’s juvenile justice system. One of our key allies is the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, which has expressed its support for the policy idea.



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<sup>11</sup> Raisetheage.org. "How were kids affected?" May 2014. <http://www.raisetheagect.org/results-kidsaffected.html>

<sup>12</sup> Redding, Richard E. "Juvenile Transfer Laws: An Effective Deterrent to Delinquency?" *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*, June 2010. Accessed November 28, 2016. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/220595.pdf>

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<sup>15</sup> Raisetheage.org. "Results." 2010. <http://www.raisetheagect.org/results.html>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Key Facts: Youth in the Justice System." June 2016. <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/images/factsheets/KeyYouthCrimeFactsJune72016final.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Let's get children out of adult courts, jails, and prisons." June 7, 2016. <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/images/factsheets/BasicFactsJune72016final.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Key Facts: Youth in the Justice System."

<sup>20</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "African-American Youth in the Justice System." June 2008. <http://campaignforyouthjustice.org/documents/AfricanAmericanBrief.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Let's get children out of adult courts, jails, and prisons."

# Securing the Rights of Human Trafficking Survivors by Promoting the Use of T Visas

By Brigid Kennedy, *Roosevelt @ Michigan State University*

## Thesis

The Michigan legislature should require law enforcement in Michigan to make survivors of human trafficking aware of their right to apply for a T visa to stay in the United States.

## Background Analysis

The state of Michigan has the second-most sex trafficking cases in the country, after Nevada.<sup>1</sup> Reports of human trafficking in Michigan have increased every year since 2012.<sup>2</sup> In 2000, Congress created “T visas,” which are visas for survivors of human trafficking who were trafficked into the U.S., would “suffer extreme hardship” if removed from the U.S., and are willing to comply with law enforcement efforts to investigate trafficking. T visas allow survivors and their qualifying family members to live and work in the United States for three or more years, and provide a path to permanent citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Though 5,000 T visas are available per year, very few survivors apply.<sup>4</sup> Individuals who are trafficked often already have little or no social safety net, and they may have been intentionally misinformed about their rights by their traffickers.<sup>5</sup> While about 17,500 people are trafficked into the country each year, the government routinely awards fewer than half the 5,000 possible visas.<sup>6</sup> It is inhumane to deport a person immediately after they are removed from a trafficking situation. If an effort is made to make survivors of human trafficking aware of their options to stay in the country, T visa applications will increase, increasing quality of life for survivors and making investigations of trafficking rings easier for law enforcement.

## Talking Points

- Existing human trafficking policy is failing because the people who need these resources the most don’t know that they have the ability to access them.
- T visas allow survivors of human trafficking to live and work in the United States, but also assist law enforcement efforts in preventing future trafficking.
- Requiring Michigan law enforcement to make survivors aware of their right to apply for a T visa would help bridge the gap between the roughly 2,000 T visas granted each year and the 5,000 T visa cap set by Congress.

## Policy Idea

T visas allow survivors of human trafficking to live and work in the United States, but many individuals don’t know they have the right to apply. In order to bridge the gap between applications for T visas and the number of T visas that can be granted, law enforcement in Michigan should be required to explain T visas and the rights they entail to survivors of human trafficking with whom they come into contact.

### KEY FACTS

- Reports of human trafficking in the state of Michigan have increased every year since 2012.<sup>1</sup>
- Only Nevada reports more sex trafficking cases each year than Michigan.<sup>1</sup>
- About 17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year.<sup>1</sup>
- Implementing a policy requiring law enforcement to tell survivors of human trafficking about their right to apply for a T visa would cost taxpayers virtually nothing.

## Policy Analysis

T visas not only allow individuals to live and work in the country and apply for permanent residence, but also allow law enforcement agencies more access to individuals who have information about human trafficking.<sup>7</sup> Thus, they have the power to both help survivors of trafficking and assist in the dismantling of trafficking rings to prevent further trafficking. Informing individuals of their rights will cost virtually nothing once law enforcement has been trained to identify and inform eligible applicants, but it has the potential to help thousands of people every year. This would make existing policy regarding T visas more effective.

Policy often imagines all human trafficking as the sex trafficking of white women, though other groups of people are at an even higher risk of being trafficked in the U.S. due to language barriers, distrust of law enforcement, and, in some cases, the lack of a social safety net. T visas cover both sex and labor trafficking, and they have the power to impact a variety of diverse communities. Requiring law enforcement to inform all survivors of their right to apply for a T visa would help bring existing resources to individuals who are less likely to be able to take advantage of them.

## Next Steps

The support of the Michigan legislature will be necessary to implement this policy. Michigan has a number of organizations, including the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force, dedicated to ending trafficking and improving the lives of survivors of human trafficking, and these organizations would be instrumental in advocating for the implementation of a policy that would require state law enforcement to make survivors aware of their right to apply for a T visa. Michigan State Senator Vincent Gregory has introduced numerous anti-trafficking bills and would likely be a key ally. The support of Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette would also be instrumental.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Michigan No. 2 in Human Trafficking; Snyder Assigns New Team to Fight It." *Fox 2 Detroit*, March 04, 2015. <http://www.fox2detroit.com/news/230640-story>.

<sup>2</sup> Hinkley, Justin A., and Matt Mencarini. "Sex Trafficking Reaches New Places, Lives in Michigan." *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 2016. <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/06/02/sex-trafficking-michigan-ireland/85290032/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Victims of Human Trafficking: T Nonimmigrant Status." U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. October 03, 2011. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.

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<sup>4</sup> Shelley, Louise. *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. *RESOURCES: THE MINDSET OF A HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIM*.

<sup>6</sup> Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> "Victims of Human Trafficking: T Nonimmigrant Status." U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. October 03, 2011. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.

<sup>8</sup> Hinkley, Justin A., and Matt Mencarini. "Sex Trafficking Reaches New Places, Lives in Michigan." *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 2016. <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/06/02/sex-trafficking-michigan-ireland/85290032/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Michigan No. 2 in Human Trafficking; Snyder Assigns New Team to Fight It." *Fox 2 Detroit*, March 04, 2015. <http://www.fox2detroit.com/news/230640-story>.

<sup>10</sup> "Fact Sheet." Attorney General Bill Schuette. [http://www.michigan.gov/ag/0,4534,7-164-60857\\_60858---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/ag/0,4534,7-164-60857_60858---,00.html).

# *Eliminating Political Bias in Death Penalty Sentencing: Ending Judicial Override*

By Rachel Knowles, Roosevelt @ Columbia

## Thesis

Alabama's current sentencing rules often lead to the excessive prescription of death sentences. To remedy this issue, the Alabama Legislature should pass a law preventing judges from imposing the death penalty against the recommendation of a jury.

## Background Analysis

Alabama is the only state that allows judges to override the sentencing recommendations of a jury to impose the death penalty.<sup>1</sup> It also has an elected judiciary. Both of these policies are problematic in isolation, and the combination of the two makes for a unique and particularly nasty cocktail. Judges running for reelection in a conservative state like Alabama must be prepared to prove to the citizenry that they are "tough on crime," and nothing communicates toughness like the death penalty.

Though in theory judges can override juries to impose the death penalty or to reduce a sentence of death to life without parole, in 92 percent of cases judges have overridden to impose capital punishment.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, study after study has shown that a higher proportion of death sentences are imposed by judicial override during election years.<sup>3</sup>

When a citizen's life is at stake, the political needs of an elected official should have zero impact on decision-making. Yet, as long as Alabama's judges know declining to impose the death penalty could negatively impact their careers, their decision to impose capital punishment cannot be free of bias. Whether conscious or not, it is currently in the political interest of judges to send defendants to death row. This conflict of interest is impermissible.

## Talking Points

- Allowing an elected judge to override the sentence chosen by a jury creates a dangerous conflict of interest that can lead to unnecessarily harsh punishment.
- Alabama law allows judges to override jury sentences for any reason, which means they can let political considerations influence their decisions without having to justify it.
- When determining whether a citizen will live or die, nothing but the facts of the case should be taken into account.

## KEY FACTS

- Judges are more likely to override juries to impose a death sentence in election years.<sup>6</sup>
- Twenty-one percent of the 199 people on Alabama's death row were placed there by judicial override.<sup>7</sup>
- Judges may override a jury's sentence for any reason, leaving them especially susceptible to bias, as they do not need to justify the increased punishment.

## Policy Idea

Though the stakes in this issue are literally life and death, the solution is simple. The Alabama Legislature must pass a law preventing judges from overriding juries to impose the death penalty. This change would remove political bias from death penalty sentencing and reduce the use of excessively harsh punishment. Currently, 21 percent of the 199 people on Alabama's death row were placed there by judicial override.<sup>4</sup> All of these lives would be saved if judges were forced to honor the decision of the jury.

## Policy Analysis

There is evidence that removing the ability of judges to impose the death penalty unilaterally will help to remedy the unequal treatment of black and white defendants in Alabama's criminal justice system. Though less than 35 percent of Alabama's homicide victims are white, 75 percent of all death sentences imposed by override involve white victims.<sup>5</sup> Political bias is the root of this injustice as well. Judges know that citizens will be more outraged by the murder of a white person than by the murder of a black person. Thus, judges can score more political points in harshly punishing a white person's killer. The roots of racial bias in Alabama's criminal justice system are deep, and no one statutory change can fix the issue. However, banning judicial override would be one small step in the right direction.

Judicial override is unfair, cruel, and bad policy. Alabama must banish this draconian practice and follow the rest of the nation into the 21st century.

## Next Steps

Because Alabamians generally support the death penalty, framing this issue will be very important. Though this policy would reduce the number of death sentences imposed, presenting that as the policy's goal would be a mistake. When advocating for this change, it will be important to emphasize how it will reduce political conflicts of interest and improve judicial ethics. Alabama has seen many instances of political corruption in recent years, making citizens highly distrustful of elected officials. This policy could be popular because it puts power in the hands of citizen juries rather than "career politicians."

The Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama will likely be a powerful coalition partner in this effort. EJI has already done excellent work studying the effects of judicial override on death penalty sentencing in Alabama and publicizing the extent of the problem. As a nationally renowned legal nonprofit, EJI will be a strong ally in seeking this policy change.

It is also very possible that judges themselves would support this policy change. It cannot be easy to unilaterally condemn a person to death. This change would take that choice out of a judge's hands.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Alabama Information." Death Penalty Information Center. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/alabama-0>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Death Penalty in Alabama: Judge Override." Equal Justice Initiative. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://eji.org/reports/death-penalty-alabama-judge-override>.

<sup>3</sup> Berry, Kate. "How Judicial Elections Impact Criminal Cases." Brennan Center for Justice. Accessed November 2016. [http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/How\\_Judicial\\_Elections\\_Impact\\_Criminal\\_Cases.pdf](http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/How_Judicial_Elections_Impact_Criminal_Cases.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "The Death Penalty in Alabama: Judge Override." Equal Justice Initiative. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://eji.org/reports/death-penalty-alabama-judge-override>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Berry, Kate. "How Judicial Elections Impact Criminal Cases." Brennan Center for Justice. Accessed November 2016.

<sup>7</sup> "The Death Penalty in Alabama: Judge Override." Equal Justice Initiative. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://eji.org/reports/death-penalty-alabama-judge-override>.



# Equal Justice For More: Putting Intermediaries In Courtrooms

By Ali Fraerman and Connor Haseley, *Roosevelt @ Columbia*

## Thesis

Intermediaries who provide direct person-to-person intervention in courtroom procedures for the benefit of those most vulnerable to coercion, those with cognitive disabilities, would progress the justice system towards a greater standard of equality.

## Background Analysis

According to The Advocate's Gateway, a UK organization providing guidance on vulnerable individuals in court, vulnerable individuals face disadvantage at the hands of the justice system because they "may not give complete, coherent or accurate testimony and, in the case of the defendant, they may also be unable to follow or participate effectively in the hearing."<sup>1</sup> Innocent people are sometimes convicted because of their inability to effectively take the stand, and guilty people sometimes walk free because their victims and witnesses cannot effectively testify.

For the purposes of our proposed policy in New York, we subscribe to the definition in a toolkit used by the UK program, defining 'vulnerable' as "those who are young, have experienced trauma, have attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, mental health needs, specific learning difficulties and deafness, as well as older people and those with physical disabilities or health conditions which may negatively affect their ability to effectively participate in the trial process."<sup>2</sup>

Just as in the UK, we propose the intermediary's function to be "to communicate to the vulnerable witness, 'questions put to the witness, and to any persons asking such questions, the answers given by the witness in reply to them, and to explain such questions or answers so far as necessary to enable them to be understood by the witness or person in question.'"<sup>3</sup>

## Talking Points

- Shows like *Making a Murderer* have exposed the coercive nature of the US justice system, this policy actively combats this by giving trained third parties the access and the ability to mitigate coercion.
- The intermediary system in the UK has proved successful. A review of the intermediary program found that "Intermediaries for vulnerable people in the justice system are in high demand because of the benefits they bring in ascertaining the best evidence."
- With Jeff Sessions in charge of the DOJ, successful policy in local courts is more important than ever. This program is already functioning in the United Kingdom, it can function here as well.

## KEY FACTS

- 77% percent of wrongful convictions are attributed to perjury/false accusation, mistaken witness identification, false confession, or official misconduct, which could all take root in coerced or inaccurate statements by a vulnerable witness or defendant. By improving the accuracy of the courtroom process, intermediary services will lead to a reduction in the number of wrongful convictions.<sup>8</sup>
- 40% of inmates in Rikers Island have some sort of mental disability.<sup>9</sup> Intermediary services are specifically designed to serve this particular population.

## Policy Idea

Create legal parameters within the New York State Courts allowing licensed mental health care workers to become intermediaries in court proceedings to assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, and defendants. Intermediaries would be registered in a New York State database and accessible when state psychologists deem it necessary.

Create standards to qualify the intermediaries and the need of the victims, witnesses, and defendants accompanied by an easy to use database. Implement a pilot program in New York State with idea of expansion nationwide.

## Policy Analysis

As it stands, courtroom procedure in the United States is not designed to account for vulnerable individuals' unique needs. As has been shown in the UK, intermediaries whose sole job is to ensure the proper functioning of the justice system are effective at patching this design flaw. The fact that the UK system has been in place for so long allows a similar system in the US to avoid the growing pains the UK system endured while building off its successes. The UK government recently doubled its funding for intermediaries with great fanfare, showing that such a policy can attract broad political support across party lines.<sup>4</sup>

The bottom line is that making courtroom procedure fair for the most vulnerable people in our society bolsters the integrity of the justice system and is a step towards the progressive realization of the principle of equal protection under the law. Since prosecutors' racial bias often affects courtroom interactions, the use intermediaries not affiliated with prosecutors should be able to especially benefit vulnerable people of color.<sup>5</sup>

As best as can be ascertained, in the UK it costs around \$115 million annually to provide intermediary services to a population of 64 million such that 95% of requesters were matched with an intermediary.<sup>67</sup> We see no reason for costs to be substantially higher per capita were a similar policy introduced in New York State.

## Next Steps

Our first step is to define and pass into law the parameters to allow intermediaries to have the capacity to clarify questions and processes to witnesses and defendants in court, we need to write a bill and pass it in the New York State Legislature to implement our policy. We have a relationship with New York State Senator Daniel Squadron, ranking Democrat in the Senate Codes Committee. We can have Senator Squadron's office help us write and lobby a bill in the State Senate, and use his contacts in the State House of Representatives to lobby it there.

In New York City, we will pitch the idea to the office of our City Councilman Mark Levine, who we have worked with before. He can help us contact the District Attorney and Public Defender offices in the five boroughs, as well as prominent judges, and get their support for our policy.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Advocate's Gateway. "Identifying Vulnerability in Victims and Witnesses." (n.d.): n. pag. The Advocate's Gateway, 10 July 2014. Web. 2 Dec. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Advocate's Gateway. "Case Management When a Witness or a Defendant Is Vulnerable." (n.d.): n. pag. The Advocate's Gateway. Dec. 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.theadvocatesgateway.org/images/toolkits/1acasemanagementwhenawitnessordefendantisvulnerable141215.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Intermediaries." Intermediaries - The Advocate's Gateway. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.theadvocatesgateway.org/intermediaries>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice. Courtroom Communications Experts to Double. Government of the United Kingdom. Ministry of Justice, 23 Feb. 2015. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/courtroom-communications-experts-to-double>>.

<sup>5</sup> M., S. "The Supreme Court Cracks down on Racist Prosecutors." The Economist. The Economist Newspaper, 24 May 2016. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2016/05/juries-and-racial-bias>>.

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Justice. Courtroom Communications Experts to Double. Government of the United Kingdom. Ministry of Justice, 23 Feb. 2015. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/courtroom-communications-experts-to-double>>.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, Penny. Ten Years of Registered Intermediaries in England and Wales. Rep. London: City Law School City U London, n.d. Print.

<sup>8</sup> "Exonerations Contributing Factors By Crime." The National Registry of Exonerations. THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE NEWKIRK CENTER FOR SCIENCE & SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL & MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW, 2 Dec. 2016. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/ExonerationsContribFactorsByCrime.aspx>>.

<sup>9</sup> Winerip, Michael, and Michael Schwirtz. "For Mentally Ill Inmates at Rikers Island, a Cycle of Jail and Hospitals." The New York Times. The New York Times, 11 Apr. 2015. Web. 02 Dec. 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/nyregion/for-mentally-ill-inmates-at-rikers-a-cycle-of-jail-and-hospitals.html>>.

# *Sex Trafficking Prevention in Georgia: Equipping Hotel Workers with the Proper Resources*

By Avni Ahuja, Roosevelt @ University of Georgia

## **Thesis**

Employees of hotels and motels should be required to undergo training that teaches them how to recognize the signs of sex trafficking and how to report those signs to appropriate law enforcement agencies.

## **Background Analysis**

Human trafficking, referred to as “modern-day slavery,” is not only a crime but a human rights abuse. Its perpetrators use force, coercion, or fraud to manipulate victims into forms of servitude such as sexual exploitation or forced labor. Human trafficking is the world’s fastest growing criminal industry, estimated to generate \$32 billion annually.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the FBI ranks Atlanta as one of the top cities for child sex trafficking.<sup>2</sup> However, this form of trafficking pervades almost every part of Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

Under Georgia HB 141, certain establishments, including hotels and motels, are required to post a notice to enable subjects of trafficking to obtain help.<sup>4</sup> This is not sufficient to address the relationship between lodging areas and human trafficking. From December 2007 to February 2015, 1,434 cases of human trafficking in hotels and motels were reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) and Polaris, 92 percent of which were sex trafficking.<sup>5</sup> Traffickers capitalize on the privacy and anonymity offered by lodging establishments and are able to operate with low risk when staff and the community are not aware of the signs of human trafficking.<sup>6</sup> Sex trafficking victims are required to go to rooms rented out by customers (out-call) or are forced to have customers come to their hotel room (in-call). Ultimately, traffickers and others in this criminal industry are capitalizing on the lack of awareness around this issue specifically within lodging businesses.

## **Talking Points**

- Hotels and motels represent a disproportionate site of sex trafficking due to the privacy and anonymity they offer to traffickers, customers, and victims.
- Training hotel and motel employees would equip them with the proper resources to potentially identify victims of human trafficking. They would also be taught how to report this crime to the appropriate law enforcement.
- If these establishments were required to train employees on how to identify potential victims and report it to the appropriate agency, fewer sex trafficking victims would pass unnoticed through hotels or motels.

## **Policy Idea**

Any establishment that provides lodging services should require its employees to be trained to recognize signs of sex trafficking and activities commonly associated with sex trafficking. Employees

## **KEY FACTS**

- Traffickers and those who purchase from them can capitalize on the anonymity and privacy offered by lodging establishments.<sup>13</sup>
- The Polaris Project and the NHTRC reported that from December 2007 to February 2015 there had been 1,434 reported cases of trafficking in hotels and motels, of which 92 percent were related to sex trafficking. Forty-five percent of the victims were minors, and 94 percent of the victims were female.<sup>14</sup>
- The average age of entry into the commercial sex market for women and girls is 12–14.<sup>15</sup>
- According to a 2012 BEST study, 63 percent of trafficking incidents happen in hotels.<sup>16</sup>

should be taught how to report signs of trafficking to the appropriate agency or law enforcement. By October 2018, the training should be incorporated into the initial training process for all new employees and those employees who do not receive an initial training should also undergo the training. The Georgia Department for Justice would compile the proper resources and distribute them to lodging establishments.

## Policy Analysis

Georgia has actively taken many steps to counter sex trafficking, but these solutions are concerned with the justice system and how victims go through the judicial process. For example, the Safe Harbor Law addresses inconsistencies with how children exploited for commercial sex are treated by the courts. While these policies are important, more needs to be done to identify victims and potential victims so that they can be removed from a dangerous situation and provided with restorative resources. The Safe Harbor Amendment, which sets up a fund to aid child sex trafficking victims, would be instrumental in this regard.<sup>8</sup> While these policies are important, more needs to be done to identify victims and potential victims so that they can be removed from a dangerous situation and provided with restorative resources. The Safe Harbor Amendment, which sets up a fund to aid child sex trafficking victims, would be instrumental in this regard.<sup>9</sup> The NHTRC reports that from 2007 to 2015 only 22 percent of the calls reporting trafficking in hotels and motels were made by victims self-reporting the crimes against them.<sup>10</sup> Over three-quarters of the calls were reported by people who either observed suspicious activity or came into contact with a victim. If employees are on the lookout for trafficking and report it when they see it, it will be much more difficult for traffickers and those purchasing sex to get away with crimes. This policy can have a positive benefit for everyone in the state of Georgia. Trafficking in lodging establishments presents a risk for the safety and security of the hotel as well as for lawful hotel customers.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, many approved training presentations are available online, so it will be relatively cost-effective for the Department of Justice to create a proper training guide.<sup>12</sup> Etiam at nulla id nulla blandit accumsan. Nunc ex dui, imperdiet eget

## Next Steps

The Georgia legislature will need to pass this policy to require lodging establishments to train their employees to recognize and report signs of sex trafficking. We will connect with relevant legislators and stakeholders who can move our policy forward through the Georgia legislature. Senator Renee Unterman from District 45 has strongly advocated for laws pertaining to trafficking and for the proper treatment of trafficking victims. If approached properly, we are confident that she would sponsor this policy. Key organizations such as YouthSpark, Georgia Cares, and Street Grace should form a coalition for joint advocacy to bring this policy to Georgia Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Lobby Day. At this event, held annually in February, Georgia activists lobby for laws relating to domestic minor sex trafficking. This policy idea would gain traction at a statewide event such as this.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Attorney's Office. "Sex Trafficking Law Enforcement Task Force Highlighted During National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month," United States Department of Justice, Retrieved November 15, 2016 (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ri/pr/sex-trafficking-law-enforcement-task-force-highlighted-during-national-slavery-and-human>)

<sup>2</sup> Swecker, Chris. "Exploiting Americans on American Soil: Domestic Trafficking Exposed," The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Retrieved November 15, 2016 (<https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/testimony/exploiting-americans-on-american-soil-domestic-trafficking-exposed>).

<sup>3</sup> The Shapiro Group. “Men Who Buy Sex with Adolescent Girls: A Scientific Research Study,” The Shapiro Group, Retrieved November 15, 2016 (<http://youth-spark.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TSG-Complete-Demand-Study.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> H.R. Bill 141, Sess. of 2013 (Georgia 2013), <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/display/20132014/HB/141>

<sup>5</sup> Polaris Project. “Human Trafficking and the Hotel Industry,” Polaris Project, Retrieved November 16, 2016 (<https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/human-trafficking-hotel-industry-recommendations.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> McCartin, Elaine. “Human Trafficking in the Hotel Industry,” Polaris Project, Retrieved November 17, 2016 (<https://polarisproject.org/blog/2016/02/10/human-trafficking-hotel-industry>).

<sup>7</sup> National Human Trafficking Hotline. “Hotel/Motel Based Commercial Sex,” Polaris Project, Retrieved November 17, 2016 (<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/what-human-trafficking/sex-trafficking/hotelmotel-based-commercial-sex>).

<sup>8</sup> H.R. Bill 244, Sess. of 2015 (Georgia 2015), <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20152016/146966.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Walker, Grace. “BREAKING: Amendment One of Georgia ballot fails, other three pass,” The Red & Black, Retrieved November 17, 2016. [http://www.redandblack.com/athensnews/breaking-amendment-one-on-georgia-ballot-fails-other-three-pass/article\\_d6e35db8-a62d-11e6-b4b0-eb3eaa9726d4.html](http://www.redandblack.com/athensnews/breaking-amendment-one-on-georgia-ballot-fails-other-three-pass/article_d6e35db8-a62d-11e6-b4b0-eb3eaa9726d4.html)).

<sup>10</sup> Polaris Project. “Human Trafficking and the Hotel Industry,” Polaris Project, Retrieved November 16, 2016 (<https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/human-trafficking-hotel-industry-recommendations.pdf>).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Tuppen, Holly. “Addressing Human Trafficking in the Hospitality Industry,” Green Hotelier, Retrieved November 20, 2016 (<http://www.greenhotelier.org/know-how-guides/addressing-human-trafficking-in-the-hospitality-industry/>).

<sup>13</sup> Polaris Project. “Human Trafficking and the Hotel Industry,” Polaris Project, Retrieved November 16, 2016 (<https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/human-trafficking-hotel-industry-recommendations.pdf>).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Center for Public Policy Studies. “Georgia Human Trafficking Fact Sheet”, Center for Public Policy Studies, Retrieved November 20, 2016 (<http://www.htcourts.org/wp-content/uploads/GA-HT-Fact-Sheet-6.4.13.pdf?Factsheet=HT-GA>).

<sup>16</sup> Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking. “100 hotel owners and managers trained to prevent trafficking,” Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking, Retrieved November 18, 2016 (<http://www.bestalliance.org/archive-newsletters.html>).



# Ending the Automatic Transfer of Juveniles to Adult Court in Connecticut

By Sarah Rakin, Sean Gutierrez, Enzo Cerrutti, Gerard Lanzano and Julia Keller,  
Roosevelt @ Connecticut College

## Thesis

In Connecticut, juveniles 15 and older who are charged with a Class A or B felony are automatically transferred to adult court.<sup>1</sup> The state should enact a change from automatic transfer to discretionary transfer in order to account for extenuating circumstances that surround juvenile crime.<sup>2</sup>

## Background Analysis

Individuals under 18 years of age are better served by the juvenile justice system because the juvenile system requires that educational services be provided, that the individual's record be sealed at the age of 18 (depending on the amount of time a case has been closed), and that juveniles not be subject to mandatory minimum sentencing laws. Staying in the juvenile system prevents young people from being sent to adult prisons, where they are at risk for much higher rates of sexual assault<sup>3</sup> and suicide attempts.<sup>4</sup>

Until 2007, Connecticut was one of only three states that treated 16-year-olds as adults. Although concern about this law grew in the 1990s, it remained unchanged because of national discourse on “law and order” and “being tough on crime.” By 2007, The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance successfully lobbied to bring 16- and 17-year-olds under the jurisdiction of the juvenile system as a result of the “Raise the Age” campaign. However, the caveat of automatic transfer in the case of a Class A or B felony remained. Currently, youth of color and low-income youth are the groups most affected by the law. In 2015, an equal amount of black and white children were arrested in Connecticut. Since black youth only make up 12 percent of the population, this means they were five times more likely to be arrested than white children.<sup>5</sup> Minority children are also more likely to be detained and for longer periods of time.<sup>6</sup>

## Talking Points

- Connecticut is one of only two states in the Northeast region that allows for automatic transfer without a waiver system.<sup>7</sup>
- The automatic transfer policy disproportionately affects non-white youth.
- Unlike juvenile courts, adult courts have mandatory minimum sentencing.
- Adult prisons systems do not provide educational services.

## KEY FACTS

- Young people prosecuted in the adult system are 34 times more likely to recidivate and commit more violent offenses than their peers in the juvenile system who are charged with the same type of crime. This remains true even if they only receive a sentence of probation.<sup>8</sup>
- Juveniles can receive community-based programming as an alternative to detention for an average cost of \$75 a day, a fifth of the cost of incarceration. Every dollar spent on evidence-based programs (i.e. multidimensional treatment foster care, multisystemic therapy) can yield up to \$13 in cost savings.<sup>9</sup>
- Black youth make up 62 percent of minors prosecuted in the adult system nationally and are nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence.<sup>20</sup>
- Minors can receive an adult criminal record and are consequently denied employment, educational opportunities, and housing, and can be barred from receiving student financial aid.<sup>21</sup>



## Policy Idea

No individual under 18 who has been arrested should be subject to an automatic transfer to adult court without being able to present an argument for why the juvenile court would better serve their needs. The juvenile justice system in Connecticut has a transfer process based on discretionary waivers for C, D, and unclassified felonies that should be applied to all felony classes. Discretionary waivers enable juvenile court judges to waive jurisdiction, if deemed necessary, in cases involving minors to allow prosecution to continue in adult court. The juvenile court must conduct a hearing in which all parties are able to present evidence relevant to the waiver issue.<sup>8</sup> This includes any evidence that would suggest that the best interests of the child and the public would be better served by a juvenile court.

## Policy Analysis

In Connecticut, approximately 200 minors are transferred to adult court each year.<sup>9</sup> On average, this group is 53.2 percent black, 26.6 percent Hispanic, and 19.7 percent white.<sup>10</sup> The racial disparity indicates that crimes are being committed and prosecuted at different rates because of structural inequality. While a few of these minors may constitute a real threat to public safety and require secure detention, the great majority would benefit more from the juvenile system and the rehabilitative services it provides.<sup>11</sup> If convicted in adult court, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the effects of stigmatization and feelings of resentment and injustice.<sup>12</sup> Even worse, if sent to adult prison, (pre- or post- trial) young people are much more vulnerable to sexual assault<sup>13</sup> and feelings of social isolation and depression, and are 36 times more likely to commit suicide.<sup>14</sup> After being released, the negative effects of a criminal record follow them, which makes it significantly more difficult to find employment or housing. The culmination of these factors leads to higher rates of recidivism. Therefore, the state is actually creating a threat to public safety by imposing such punitive measures.

Economically, we predict that this policy will have similar effects to the “Raise the Age” policy, which was approved in 2007. After Connecticut redefined “juveniles” to include 16- and 17-year-olds, the state spent less on the juvenile justice system than it had 10 years prior.<sup>15</sup> The state actually spent \$12 million less than it had budgeted for reform.<sup>16</sup> Since the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who enter the system each year is much greater than the 200 adolescents sent to adult court, the budget would not substantially increase. Community-based programming has been proven to yield lower costs in both the short and long term compared to incarceration.<sup>17</sup> Lower rates of recidivism will reduce costs for the state in the long term, and individuals who do not reoffend are more likely to gain employment, thus generating tax revenue.

## Next Steps

The Connecticut General Assembly must be lobbied. Specifically, we intend to lobby the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, a group that has already made significant strides in improving Connecticut’s juvenile justice system. One of our key allies is the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, which has expressed its support for the policy idea.

<sup>1</sup> This holds true except for a number of Class B felonies that have been carved out as exemptions to

<sup>2</sup> "OPM: Juvenile Justice System." Office of Policy and Management . Last modified September 16, 2016. <http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?Q=383628>.

<sup>3</sup> Walton, Reggie B., John A. Kaneb, James E. Aiken, Jamie Fellner, Pat Nolan, Gustavus A. Puryear IV, Brenda V. Smith, and Cindy Stuckerman-Johnson. "National Prison Rape Elimination Commission Report." *National Prison Rape Elimination Commission Report*, June 2009, 155. Accessed November 28, 2016. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/226680.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Atlantic. "The Steep Costs of Keeping Juveniles in Adult Prisons." Last modified January 8, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/the-cost-of-keeping-juveniles-in-adult-prisons/423201/>

<sup>5</sup> The CT Mirror. "The State of Connecticut juvenile incarceration in 17 charts." Jacqueline Rabe Thomas. Last modified September 30, 2015. <http://ctmirror.org/2015/09/30/juvenile-justice-in-ct-in-17-charts/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> National Juvenile Defence Center. State Profiles. Accessed November 28, 2016. <http://njdc.info/practice-policy-resources/state-profiles/>

<sup>8</sup> Ojjdp.gov "Trying Juneniles as Adults in Criminal Court." December 1998. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/tryingjuvasadult/transfer.html>

<sup>9</sup> The CT Mirror. "The State of Connecticut juvenile incarceration in 17 charts."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Raisetheage.org. "How were kids affected?" May 2014. <http://www.raisetheagect.org/results-kidsaffected.html>

<sup>12</sup> Redding, Richard E. "Juvenile Transfer Laws: An Effective Deterrent to Delinquency?" *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*, June 2010. Accessed November 28, 2016. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/220595.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Walton et al.. "National Prison Rape Elimination Commission Report."

<sup>14</sup> The Atlantic. "The Steep Costs of Keeping Juveniles in Adult Prisons."

<sup>15</sup> Raisetheage.org. "Results." 2010. <http://www.raisetheagect.org/results.html>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Key Facts: Youth in the Justice System." June 2016. <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/images/factsheets/KeyYouthCrimeFactsJune72016final.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Let's get children out of adult courts, jails, and prisons." June 7, 2016. <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/images/factsheets/BasicFactsJune72016final.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Key Facts: Youth in the Justice System."

<sup>20</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "African-American Youth in the Justice System." June 2008. <http://campaignforyouthjustice.org/documents/AfricanAmericanBrief.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Campaignforyouthjustice.org. "Let's get children out of adult courts, jails, and prisons."

# Securing the Rights of Human Trafficking Survivors by Promoting the Use of T Visas

By Brigid Kennedy, *Roosevelt @ Michigan State University*

## Thesis

The Michigan legislature should require law enforcement in Michigan to make survivors of human trafficking aware of their right to apply for a T visa to stay in the United States.

## Background Analysis

The state of Michigan has the second-most sex trafficking cases in the country, after Nevada.<sup>1</sup> Reports of human trafficking in Michigan have increased every year since 2012.<sup>2</sup> In 2000, Congress created “T visas,” which are visas for survivors of human trafficking who were trafficked into the U.S., would “suffer extreme hardship” if removed from the U.S., and are willing to comply with law enforcement efforts to investigate trafficking. T visas allow survivors and their qualifying family members to live and work in the United States for three or more years, and provide a path to permanent citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Though 5,000 T visas are available per year, very few survivors apply.<sup>4</sup> Individuals who are trafficked often already have little or no social safety net, and they may have been intentionally misinformed about their rights by their traffickers.<sup>5</sup> While about 17,500 people are trafficked into the country each year, the government routinely awards fewer than half the 5,000 possible visas.<sup>6</sup> It is inhumane to deport a person immediately after they are removed from a trafficking situation. If an effort is made to make survivors of human trafficking aware of their options to stay in the country, T visa applications will increase, increasing quality of life for survivors and making investigations of trafficking rings easier for law enforcement.

## Talking Points

- Existing human trafficking policy is failing because the people who need these resources the most don’t know that they have the ability to access them.
- T visas allow survivors of human trafficking to live and work in the United States, but also assist law enforcement efforts in preventing future trafficking.
- Requiring Michigan law enforcement to make survivors aware of their right to apply for a T visa would help bridge the gap between the roughly 2,000 T visas granted each year and the 5,000 T visa cap set by Congress.

## Policy Idea

T visas allow survivors of human trafficking to live and work in the United States, but many individuals don’t know they have the right to apply. In order to bridge the gap between applications for T visas and the number of T visas that can be granted, law enforcement in Michigan should be required to explain T visas and the rights they entail to survivors of human trafficking with whom they come into contact.

### KEY FACTS

- Reports of human trafficking in the state of Michigan have increased every year since 2012.<sup>1</sup>
- Only Nevada reports more sex trafficking cases each year than Michigan.<sup>1</sup>
- About 17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year.<sup>1</sup>
- Implementing a policy requiring law enforcement to tell survivors of human trafficking about their right to apply for a T visa would cost taxpayers virtually nothing.

## Policy Analysis

T visas not only allow individuals to live and work in the country and apply for permanent residence, but also allow law enforcement agencies more access to individuals who have information about human trafficking.<sup>7</sup> Thus, they have the power to both help survivors of trafficking and assist in the dismantling of trafficking rings to prevent further trafficking. Informing individuals of their rights will cost virtually nothing once law enforcement has been trained to identify and inform eligible applicants, but it has the potential to help thousands of people every year. This would make existing policy regarding T visas more effective.

Policy often imagines all human trafficking as the sex trafficking of white women, though other groups of people are at an even higher risk of being trafficked in the U.S. due to language barriers, distrust of law enforcement, and, in some cases, the lack of a social safety net. T visas cover both sex and labor trafficking, and they have the power to impact a variety of diverse communities. Requiring law enforcement to inform all survivors of their right to apply for a T visa would help bring existing resources to individuals who are less likely to be able to take advantage of them.

## Next Steps

The support of the Michigan legislature will be necessary to implement this policy. Michigan has a number of organizations, including the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force, dedicated to ending trafficking and improving the lives of survivors of human trafficking, and these organizations would be instrumental in advocating for the implementation of a policy that would require state law enforcement to make survivors aware of their right to apply for a T visa. Michigan State Senator Vincent Gregory has introduced numerous anti-trafficking bills and would likely be a key ally. The support of Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette would also be instrumental.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Michigan No. 2 in Human Trafficking; Snyder Assigns New Team to Fight It." *Fox 2 Detroit*, March 04, 2015. <http://www.fox2detroit.com/news/230640-story>.

<sup>2</sup> Hinkley, Justin A., and Matt Mencarini. "Sex Trafficking Reaches New Places, Lives in Michigan." *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 2016. <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/06/02/sex-trafficking-michigan-ireland/85290032/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Victims of Human Trafficking: T Nonimmigrant Status." U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. October 03, 2011. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.

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<sup>4</sup> Shelley, Louise. *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. *RESOURCES: THE MINDSET OF A HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIM*.

<sup>6</sup> Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> "Victims of Human Trafficking: T Nonimmigrant Status." U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. October 03, 2011. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.

<sup>8</sup> Hinkley, Justin A., and Matt Mencarini. "Sex Trafficking Reaches New Places, Lives in Michigan." *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 2016. <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/06/02/sex-trafficking-michigan-ireland/85290032/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Michigan No. 2 in Human Trafficking; Snyder Assigns New Team to Fight It." *Fox 2 Detroit*, March 04, 2015. <http://www.fox2detroit.com/news/230640-story>.

<sup>10</sup> "Fact Sheet." Attorney General Bill Schuette. [http://www.michigan.gov/ag/0,4534,7-164-60857\\_60858---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/ag/0,4534,7-164-60857_60858---,00.html).

# *Eliminating Political Bias in Death Penalty Sentencing: Ending Judicial Override*

By Rachel Knowles, Roosevelt @ Columbia

## Thesis

Alabama's current sentencing rules often lead to the excessive prescription of death sentences. To remedy this issue, the Alabama Legislature should pass a law preventing judges from imposing the death penalty against the recommendation of a jury.

## Background Analysis

Alabama is the only state that allows judges to override the sentencing recommendations of a jury to impose the death penalty.<sup>1</sup> It also has an elected judiciary. Both of these policies are problematic in isolation, and the combination of the two makes for a unique and particularly nasty cocktail. Judges running for reelection in a conservative state like Alabama must be prepared to prove to the citizenry that they are "tough on crime," and nothing communicates toughness like the death penalty.

Though in theory judges can override juries to impose the death penalty or to reduce a sentence of death to life without parole, in 92 percent of cases judges have overridden to impose capital punishment.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, study after study has shown that a higher proportion of death sentences are imposed by judicial override during election years.<sup>3</sup>

When a citizen's life is at stake, the political needs of an elected official should have zero impact on decision-making. Yet, as long as Alabama's judges know declining to impose the death penalty could negatively impact their careers, their decision to impose capital punishment cannot be free of bias. Whether conscious or not, it is currently in the political interest of judges to send defendants to death row. This conflict of interest is impermissible.

## Talking Points

- Allowing an elected judge to override the sentence chosen by a jury creates a dangerous conflict of interest that can lead to unnecessarily harsh punishment.
- Alabama law allows judges to override jury sentences for any reason, which means they can let political considerations influence their decisions without having to justify it.
- When determining whether a citizen will live or die, nothing but the facts of the case should be taken into account.

## KEY FACTS

- Judges are more likely to override juries to impose a death sentence in election years.<sup>6</sup>
- Twenty-one percent of the 199 people on Alabama's death row were placed there by judicial override.<sup>7</sup>
- Judges may override a jury's sentence for any reason, leaving them especially susceptible to bias, as they do not need to justify the increased punishment.

## Policy Idea

Though the stakes in this issue are literally life and death, the solution is simple. The Alabama Legislature must pass a law preventing judges from overriding juries to impose the death penalty. This change would remove political bias from death penalty sentencing and reduce the use of excessively harsh punishment. Currently, 21 percent of the 199 people on Alabama's death row were placed there by judicial override.<sup>4</sup> All of these lives would be saved if judges were forced to honor the decision of the jury.

## Policy Analysis

There is evidence that removing the ability of judges to impose the death penalty unilaterally will help to remedy the unequal treatment of black and white defendants in Alabama's criminal justice system. Though less than 35 percent of Alabama's homicide victims are white, 75 percent of all death sentences imposed by override involve white victims.<sup>5</sup> Political bias is the root of this injustice as well. Judges know that citizens will be more outraged by the murder of a white person than by the murder of a black person. Thus, judges can score more political points in harshly punishing a white person's killer. The roots of racial bias in Alabama's criminal justice system are deep, and no one statutory change can fix the issue. However, banning judicial override would be one small step in the right direction.

Judicial override is unfair, cruel, and bad policy. Alabama must banish this draconian practice and follow the rest of the nation into the 21st century.

## Next Steps

Because Alabamians generally support the death penalty, framing this issue will be very important. Though this policy would reduce the number of death sentences imposed, presenting that as the policy's goal would be a mistake. When advocating for this change, it will be important to emphasize how it will reduce political conflicts of interest and improve judicial ethics. Alabama has seen many instances of political corruption in recent years, making citizens highly distrustful of elected officials. This policy could be popular because it puts power in the hands of citizen juries rather than "career politicians."

The Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama will likely be a powerful coalition partner in this effort. EJI has already done excellent work studying the effects of judicial override on death penalty sentencing in Alabama and publicizing the extent of the problem. As a nationally renowned legal nonprofit, EJI will be a strong ally in seeking this policy change.

It is also very possible that judges themselves would support this policy change. It cannot be easy to unilaterally condemn a person to death. This change would take that choice out of a judge's hands.



## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Alabama Information." Death Penalty Information Center. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/alabama-0>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Death Penalty in Alabama: Judge Override." Equal Justice Initiative. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://eji.org/reports/death-penalty-alabama-judge-override>.

<sup>3</sup> Berry, Kate. "How Judicial Elections Impact Criminal Cases." Brennan Center for Justice. Accessed November 2016. [http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/How\\_Judicial\\_Elections\\_Impact\\_Criminal\\_Cases.pdf](http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/How_Judicial_Elections_Impact_Criminal_Cases.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "The Death Penalty in Alabama: Judge Override." Equal Justice Initiative. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://eji.org/reports/death-penalty-alabama-judge-override>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Berry, Kate. "How Judicial Elections Impact Criminal Cases." Brennan Center for Justice. Accessed November 2016.

<sup>7</sup> "The Death Penalty in Alabama: Judge Override." Equal Justice Initiative. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://eji.org/reports/death-penalty-alabama-judge-override>.

# Equal Justice For More: Putting Intermediaries In Courtrooms

By Ali Fraerman and Connor Haseley, *Roosevelt @ Columbia*

## Thesis

Intermediaries who provide direct person-to-person intervention in courtroom procedures for the benefit of those most vulnerable to coercion, those with cognitive disabilities, would progress the justice system towards a greater standard of equality.

## Background Analysis

According to The Advocate's Gateway, a UK organization providing guidance on vulnerable individuals in court, vulnerable individuals face disadvantage at the hands of the justice system because they "may not give complete, coherent or accurate testimony and, in the case of the defendant, they may also be unable to follow or participate effectively in the hearing."<sup>1</sup> Innocent people are sometimes convicted because of their inability to effectively take the stand, and guilty people sometimes walk free because their victims and witnesses cannot effectively testify.

For the purposes of our proposed policy in New York, we subscribe to the definition in a toolkit used by the UK program, defining 'vulnerable' as "those who are young, have experienced trauma, have attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, mental health needs, specific learning difficulties and deafness, as well as older people and those with physical disabilities or health conditions which may negatively affect their ability to effectively participate in the trial process."<sup>2</sup>

Just as in the UK, we propose the intermediary's function to be "to communicate to the vulnerable witness, 'questions put to the witness, and to any persons asking such questions, the answers given by the witness in reply to them, and to explain such questions or answers so far as necessary to enable them to be understood by the witness or person in question.'"<sup>3</sup>

## Talking Points

- Shows like *Making a Murderer* have exposed the coercive nature of the US justice system, this policy actively combats this by giving trained third parties the access and the ability to mitigate coercion.
- The intermediary system in the UK has proved successful. A review of the intermediary program found that "Intermediaries for vulnerable people in the justice system are in high demand because of the benefits they bring in ascertaining the best evidence."
- With Jeff Sessions in charge of the DOJ, successful policy in local courts is more important than ever. This program is already functioning in the United Kingdom, it can function here as well.

## KEY FACTS

- 77% percent of wrongful convictions are attributed to perjury/false accusation, mistaken witness identification, false confession, or official misconduct, which could all take root in coerced or inaccurate statements by a vulnerable witness or defendant. By improving the accuracy of the courtroom process, intermediary services will lead to a reduction in the number of wrongful convictions.<sup>8</sup>
- 40% of inmates in Rikers Island have some sort of mental disability.<sup>9</sup> Intermediary services are specifically designed to serve this particular population.

## Policy Idea

Create legal parameters within the New York State Courts allowing licensed mental health care workers to become intermediaries in court proceedings to assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, and defendants. Intermediaries would be registered in a New York State database and accessible when state psychologists deem it necessary.

Create standards to qualify the intermediaries and the need of the victims, witnesses, and defendants accompanied by an easy to use database. Implement a pilot program in New York State with idea of expansion nationwide.

## Policy Analysis

As it stands, courtroom procedure in the United States is not designed to account for vulnerable individuals' unique needs. As has been shown in the UK, intermediaries whose sole job is to ensure the proper functioning of the justice system are effective at patching this design flaw. The fact that the UK system has been in place for so long allows a similar system in the US to avoid the growing pains the UK system endured while building off its successes. The UK government recently doubled its funding for intermediaries with great fanfare, showing that such a policy can attract broad political support across party lines.<sup>4</sup>

The bottom line is that making courtroom procedure fair for the most vulnerable people in our society bolsters the integrity of the justice system and is a step towards the progressive realization of the principle of equal protection under the law. Since prosecutors' racial bias often affects courtroom interactions, the use intermediaries not affiliated with prosecutors should be able to especially benefit vulnerable people of color.<sup>5</sup>

As best as can be ascertained, in the UK it costs around \$115 million annually to provide intermediary services to a population of 64 million such that 95% of requesters were matched with an intermediary.<sup>67</sup> We see no reason for costs to be substantially higher per capita were a similar policy introduced in New York State.

## Next Steps

Our first step is to define and pass into law the parameters to allow intermediaries to have the capacity to clarify questions and processes to witnesses and defendants in court, we need to write a bill and pass it in the New York State Legislature to implement our policy. We have a relationship with New York State Senator Daniel Squadron, ranking Democrat in the Senate Codes Committee. We can have Senator Squadron's office help us write and lobby a bill in the State Senate, and use his contacts in the State House of Representatives to lobby it there.

In New York City, we will pitch the idea to the office of our City Councilman Mark Levine, who we have worked with before. He can help us contact the District Attorney and Public Defender offices in the five boroughs, as well as prominent judges, and get their support for our policy.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Advocate's Gateway. "Identifying Vulnerability in Victims and Witnesses." (n.d.): n. pag. The Advocate's Gateway, 10 July 2014. Web. 2 Dec. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Advocate's Gateway. "Case Management When a Witness or a Defendant Is Vulnerable." (n.d.): n. pag. The Advocate's Gateway. Dec. 2015. Web. 2 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.theadvocatesgateway.org/images/toolkits/1acasemanagementwhenawitnessordefendantisvulnerable141215.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Intermediaries." Intermediaries - The Advocate's Gateway. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.theadvocatesgateway.org/intermediaries>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice. Courtroom Communications Experts to Double. Government of the United Kingdom. Ministry of Justice, 23 Feb. 2015. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

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<sup>5</sup> M., S. "The Supreme Court Cracks down on Racist Prosecutors." The Economist. The Economist Newspaper, 24 May 2016. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Justice. Courtroom Communications Experts to Double. Government of the United Kingdom. Ministry of Justice, 23 Feb. 2015. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/courtroom-communications-experts-to-double>>.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, Penny. Ten Years of Registered Intermediaries in England and Wales. Rep. London: City Law School City U London, n.d. Print.

<sup>8</sup> "Exonerations Contributing Factors By Crime." The National Registry of Exonerations. THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE NEWKIRK CENTER FOR SCIENCE & SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL & MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW, 2 Dec. 2016. Web. 02 Dec. 2016.

<<http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/ExonerationsContribFactorsByCrime.aspx>>.

<sup>9</sup> Winerip, Michael, and Michael Schwartz. "For Mentally Ill Inmates at Rikers Island, a Cycle of Jail and Hospitals." The New York Times. The New York Times, 11 Apr. 2015. Web. 02 Dec. 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/nyregion/for-mentally-ill-inmates-at-rikers-a-cycle-of-jail-and-hospitals.html>>.

# *Sex Trafficking Prevention in Georgia: Equipping Hotel Workers with the Proper Resources*

By Avni Ahuja, Roosevelt @ University of Georgia

## **Thesis**

Employees of hotels and motels should be required to undergo training that teaches them how to recognize the signs of sex trafficking and how to report those signs to appropriate law enforcement agencies.

## **Background Analysis**

Human trafficking, referred to as “modern-day slavery,” is not only a crime but a human rights abuse. Its perpetrators use force, coercion, or fraud to manipulate victims into forms of servitude such as sexual exploitation or forced labor. Human trafficking is the world’s fastest growing criminal industry, estimated to generate \$32 billion annually.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the FBI ranks Atlanta as one of the top cities for child sex trafficking.<sup>2</sup> However, this form of trafficking pervades almost every part of Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

Under Georgia HB 141, certain establishments, including hotels and motels, are required to post a notice to enable subjects of trafficking to obtain help.<sup>4</sup> This is not sufficient to address the relationship between lodging areas and human trafficking. From December 2007 to February 2015, 1,434 cases of human trafficking in hotels and motels were reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) and Polaris, 92 percent of which were sex trafficking.<sup>5</sup> Traffickers capitalize on the privacy and anonymity offered by lodging establishments and are able to operate with low risk when staff and the community are not aware of the signs of human trafficking.<sup>6</sup> Sex trafficking victims are required to go to rooms rented out by customers (out-call) or are forced to have customers come to their hotel room (in-call). Ultimately, traffickers and others in this criminal industry are capitalizing on the lack of awareness around this issue specifically within lodging businesses.

## **Talking Points**

- Hotels and motels represent a disproportionate site of sex trafficking due to the privacy and anonymity they offer to traffickers, customers, and victims.
- Training hotel and motel employees would equip them with the proper resources to potentially identify victims of human trafficking. They would also be taught how to report this crime to the appropriate law enforcement.
- If these establishments were required to train employees on how to identify potential victims and report it to the appropriate agency, fewer sex trafficking victims would pass unnoticed through hotels or motels.

## **Policy Idea**

Any establishment that provides lodging services should require its employees to be trained to recognize signs of sex trafficking and activities commonly associated with sex trafficking. Employees

## **KEY FACTS**

- Traffickers and those who purchase from them can capitalize on the anonymity and privacy offered by lodging establishments.<sup>13</sup>
- The Polaris Project and the NHTRC reported that from December 2007 to February 2015 there had been 1,434 reported cases of trafficking in hotels and motels, of which 92 percent were related to sex trafficking. Forty-five percent of the victims were minors, and 94 percent of the victims were female.<sup>14</sup>
- The average age of entry into the commercial sex market for women and girls is 12–14.<sup>15</sup>
- According to a 2012 BEST study, 63 percent of trafficking incidents happen in hotels.<sup>16</sup>

should be taught how to report signs of trafficking to the appropriate agency or law enforcement. By October 2018, the training should be incorporated into the initial training process for all new employees and those employees who do not receive an initial training should also undergo the training. The Georgia Department for Justice would compile the proper resources and distribute them to lodging establishments.

## Policy Analysis

Georgia has actively taken many steps to counter sex trafficking, but these solutions are concerned with the justice system and how victims go through the judicial process. For example, the Safe Harbor Law addresses inconsistencies with how children exploited for commercial sex are treated by the courts. While these policies are important, more needs to be done to identify victims and potential victims so that they can be removed from a dangerous situation and provided with restorative resources. The Safe Harbor Amendment, which sets up a fund to aid child sex trafficking victims, would be instrumental in this regard.<sup>8</sup> While these policies are important, more needs to be done to identify victims and potential victims so that they can be removed from a dangerous situation and provided with restorative resources. The Safe Harbor Amendment, which sets up a fund to aid child sex trafficking victims, would be instrumental in this regard.<sup>9</sup> The NHTRC reports that from 2007 to 2015 only 22 percent of the calls reporting trafficking in hotels and motels were made by victims self-reporting the crimes against them.<sup>10</sup> Over three-quarters of the calls were reported by people who either observed suspicious activity or came into contact with a victim. If employees are on the lookout for trafficking and report it when they see it, it will be much more difficult for traffickers and those purchasing sex to get away with crimes. This policy can have a positive benefit for everyone in the state of Georgia. Trafficking in lodging establishments presents a risk for the safety and security of the hotel as well as for lawful hotel customers.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, many approved training presentations are available online, so it will be relatively cost-effective for the Department of Justice to create a proper training guide.<sup>12</sup> Etiam at nulla id nulla blandit accumsan. Nunc ex dui, imperdiet eget

## Next Steps

The Georgia legislature will need to pass this policy to require lodging establishments to train their employees to recognize and report signs of sex trafficking. We will connect with relevant legislators and stakeholders who can move our policy forward through the Georgia legislature. Senator Renee Unterman from District 45 has strongly advocated for laws pertaining to trafficking and for the proper treatment of trafficking victims. If approached properly, we are confident that she would sponsor this policy. Key organizations such as YouthSpark, Georgia Cares, and Street Grace should form a coalition for joint advocacy to bring this policy to Georgia Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Lobby Day. At this event, held annually in February, Georgia activists lobby for laws relating to domestic minor sex trafficking. This policy idea would gain traction at a statewide event such as this.

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# Leading the Way with a Public and Private Food Cooperative: A Communal Answer to Tackling Food Insecurity and Poverty

By Eamon Ross, *Roosevelt @ Binghamton*

## Thesis

To combat the associated risk of food deserts in low-income neighborhoods and stimulate reinvest in the community, the City of Binghamton should establish a food cooperative in the North Side to ensure access to affordable and nutritious food.

## Background Analysis

Binghamton, NY has a poverty rate of 33.9 percent<sup>1</sup> and two designated food deserts: The most prominent being the North Side<sup>2</sup>. The USDA defines a food desert as an area in a low-income community with limited access to affordable and nutritious food<sup>3</sup>. In 1996, the last full-service grocery store in the North Side closed its doors, leaving the surrounding neighborhood devoid of a reasonably close source of healthy, affordable food<sup>4</sup>. The child poverty rate in Binghamton is 47 percent<sup>5</sup> more than twice as high as the national average of 21 percent<sup>6</sup>. Poverty negatively affects the nutritional value of consumed food<sup>7</sup> and is itself exasperated by food insecurity, increasing the effects of poverty on individuals and families<sup>8</sup>. Without affordable access to proper nutrition, children in low-income families potentially face serious health complications<sup>9</sup> which result in higher municipal costs on welfare programs and health measures<sup>10</sup>. Currently, the North Side relies on convenience stores, local eateries, and fast food outlets. Grocery stores do not open in the North Side because they are profit-driven businesses<sup>11</sup> and have little motive to open in low-income neighborhoods. Binghamton has taken some action to address the issue by funding a mobile kitchen that offers groceries to residents of the North Side<sup>12</sup>. But this is not sufficient to address the problem because the mobile kitchen has a vast area to cover, limiting access in some communities, and the community still lacks a full service grocery store.

## Talking Points

- The North Side of Binghamton has lacked a full-service grocery store for two decades and multiple efforts to incentivize grocery stores to move to the Northside have failed.
- Food deserts tend to have higher vacancy rates and contain residents with lower educational levels, incomes, and employment rates.
- With a child poverty rate of 47percent, Binghamton must secure a source of affordable and healthy food for impoverished children to avoid future health related complications and costs.
- Establishing a food cooperative in the North Side will not only make the neighborhood food secure, but encourage additional investments in the community.

## KEY FACTS

- For every dollar spent at a food cooperative, .38 cents is reinvested into the local economy compared to .24 cents at conventional grocers<sup>20</sup>
- Communities with 10 percent or more of households located in food deserts have on average a 9 percent higher rate of obesity<sup>21</sup>
- The Pennsylvania Fresh Foods Financing Initiative, provided \$120 million for grocery stores in low-income areas, created 5,000 jobs, and led to improved healthy food access for more than 400,000 people<sup>22</sup>

## Policy Idea

To take effective action against poverty and food insecurity in the Binghamton area, a secure source of nutritious and affordable food must be made accessible. Therefore, the local government must invest in the community by funding a food cooperative in the North Side through the allocation of unused grant money and local tax incentives for the donation of food to be sold at the cooperative. Establishing a food cooperative in the North Side of Binghamton will ease the effects of food insecurity on low-income families, reduce future health-related costs to the municipality and create employment opportunities while symbolizing reinvestment into the community.

## Policy Analysis

A food cooperative is a business designed with community interests in mind: they source their goods locally and their members, as both owners and customers, share a common interest in the well-being of the business<sup>13</sup>.

Combating food deserts and poverty through public-private partnerships is a successful and sustainable initiative. A public-private partnership is “...a contractual arrangement between a public agency....and a private sector entity”<sup>14</sup>. A successful example in Pennsylvania, through the Pennsylvania Fresh Foods Financing Initiative, resulted in financing \$120 million for grocery stores in low-income areas, creating 5,000 jobs, and led to improved healthy food access for more than 400,000 people<sup>15</sup>. The Fresh Foods Financing Initiative was a combination of the State of Pennsylvania and non-profit organizations which provided funding for grocery stores which opened or operated in a food desert. Its success rested on its flexibility, as it could serve a range of communities and assist both large and small businesses<sup>16</sup>.

The North Side food cooperative would work at the local level through the additional collaboration of grocery stores, community organizations and the direct involvement of the community. The coop will be funded by re-allocating money from Binghamton University’s state impact funding<sup>17</sup> in addition to reallocating funds from the Broome County Anti-Poverty Task Force, which has \$1.2 million in unallocated funds<sup>18</sup>, and the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council<sup>19</sup> towards a community fund. The construction and operation of the cooperative would stimulate commerce and promote interest in the larger community from businesses previously shy to invest. The food will be sourced from community gardens, food banks, and local retailers, facilitating community collaboration.

Local tax incentives could encourage, grocery stores to reduce waste by donating food to the co-op, which it would sell at discounted prices. Community members would be directly engaged in the management, administration, and operations of the cooperative.

## Next Steps

To garner support for this proposal a coalition must be formed between community organizations, the Binghamton City Council, and the Broome County Legislature. This coalition would include local organizations such as VINES and CHOW, which provide locally sourced food and assistance to the poor. These organizations could generate support in the community through public forums, surveys, and social media. Supporters will lobby the Binghamton City Council for the release of additional funding from the County and begin writing tax incentives for local retailers to donate food. Retailers would be surveyed on their opinions about donating still edible food. As throwing away still edible food represents a loss for retailers, and donating food will provide tax credits and positive publicity, local retailers will welcome the idea. Support from the community and the government would influence the county legislature to unlock grant money and, with the support of local retailers, for the municipality to create tax credits for donated food.

## End Notes

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# Combating the Binghamton Brain Drain: Promoting Equitable Opportunities for Student Entrepreneurs

By Brianna Cea & Nate Cutler, *Roosevelt @ Binghamton*

## Thesis

To address the lack of economic opportunities and alarmingly high emigration rates of college graduates, the Broome County Legislature should allocate funds from hotel-motel tax revenue to create a competitive and equitable student entrepreneurship grant program.

## Background Analysis

Since 2012, Broome County, NY has lost 6,000 jobs and has the lowest self-employment rate, at 8.9%, of all of the surrounding counties in New York State's Southern Tier.<sup>12</sup> A major factor contributing to job losses is the accelerating rate of emigration of college graduates, resulting in a "brain drain." In Broome County, this emigration has caused the population's median age to rise drastically from 33.3 in 1990 to 40.2 in 2010.<sup>3</sup> The changing demographics by age group also illustrate the challenge Broome County has faced in retaining its young adult population. For example, from 1990 to 2010, the 25 -44 age group experienced a drastic decline of 30.7 percent, by far the highest decline of any age group in the county.<sup>4,5</sup>

Broome County's shifting age demographics have resulted in a steady decrease in the percentage of working-age residents (ages 18 -65), lowering tax revenue, creating gaps in several workforce sectors and increasing pressure on the municipal government.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the county is in increasing need of programs that encourage young adults to remain in the community. In 2012, Broome County confronted this dilemma by raising the occupancy tax on hotel and motel rooms by 2% to fund an economic development plan with increasing entrepreneurship and nourishing a diverse population of young, educated workers as top priorities.<sup>7</sup> This 2 percent increase netted the county approximately \$725,000 to be allocated for different economic development initiatives each fiscal year, such as marketing events, brownfield remediation, corridor-based land improvements, and other entrepreneurship efforts.<sup>8</sup>

## Talking Points

- Brain drain in Broome County has steadily decreased the percentage of working-age residents, creating a disproportionately large elderly population that is associated with lower tax revenues, increased government spending on health care and pensions, and lower rates of capital investment.<sup>9</sup>
- To promote equitable access to entrepreneurship resources, the Broome County Planning Department should promote incentives for student entrepreneurs from low-income households as an additional priority initiative in the hotel-motel fund policy.
- A competitive student entrepreneurship grant program will provide economic opportunities for local college students, help combat the brain drain, increase the self-employment rate, and promote equitable access for student entrepreneurs from all backgrounds.

## KEY FACTS

- In Broome County from 1990 to 2010, the number of residents aged 25- 44 declined by 19,977, a 30.7 percent decrease. During the same period, all other age groups gained a combined 8,417 residents.<sup>10,11</sup>
- A 2 percent increase in Broome County's hotel/motel occupancy tax created approximately \$725,000 in additional tax revenue in 2015.<sup>12</sup> This money is devoted solely to the purposes of economic development.<sup>13</sup>
- Since 2012, Broome County has lost 6,000 jobs and has the lowest self-employment rate, at 8.9 percent, of all of the surrounding counties in the Southern Tier.<sup>14,15</sup>

## Policy Idea

To combat the “Binghamton Brain Drain” and increase the self-employment rate in Broome County, the Broome County Legislature and local universities must collaborate on creating incentives for college graduates to stay in the local community with a competitive student entrepreneurship grant program, financed through the “hotel-motel” occupancy tax fund. To promote equitable access to entrepreneurship resources for future grant applicants, the Broome County Planning Department should also include incentives for students from low-income households to pursue entrepreneurship as a priority initiative in the hotel motel fund policy.

## Policy Analysis

Currently, student entrepreneurship initiatives in Broome County focus primarily on high-technology startups and do not provide initial funding. Thus, the Broome County Legislature should allocate 3 percent of available hotel/motel occupancy tax revenue to a student entrepreneurship grant program, creating an annual funding stream of approximately \$21,750. Based on previous proposals for economic development funds from the hotel-motel tax fund, an annual funding stream of \$21,750 is competitive.

Capitalizing on the resources of the SUNY Bridge to Entrepreneurial Excellence Initiative, and Southern Tier Startup Alliance, winners of the grant competition would have access to incubators, educational startup trainings, mentorships, and housing-assistance programs. In return, they would agree to reside and locate their business in Broome County. Since the entrepreneurship grant program will be open to all college graduates from the local universities and colleges, it is important to recognize that not all students have equal access to entrepreneurship resources that may strengthen their application. Hence, to promote equitable access to entrepreneurship resources, the Broome County Planning Department should also promote incentives for student entrepreneurs from low-income households as an additional priority initiative in the hotel-motel fund policy. In pursuing the goal of diversifying a young workforce, this additional priority can increase the accessibility of these resources to young graduates of both four-year universities and local community colleges.

The province of Ontario, Canada has also launched successful youth entrepreneurship programs, such as the Starter Company, to reverse its “brain drain” and prepare young entrepreneurs (ages 18-29) to start small businesses.<sup>16</sup> In the City of Hamilton, the Starter Company program has trained 41 businesses, funded five storefront businesses, and contributed to the growth of 2,000 small business jobs since 2014.<sup>17</sup> A similar program will help Broome County retain a younger population by providing equitable economic opportunities, which has been shown to increase tax revenue and produce higher rates of capital investment.<sup>18</sup>

## Next Steps

To address the alarming loss of young professionals and the aging population of the county workforce, the Broome County Legislature and Planning Department must collaborate with local universities and agencies to provide incentives for college graduates to start businesses. This would include a competitive student entrepreneurship grant program that furthers the priorities of Broome County's economic development strategies. With the support of County Executive Jason Garnar (who has already publicized the entrepreneurship grant) and his Student Advisory Board, a coalition of student organizations and faculty from local universities such as Binghamton University and Broome Community College can lobby the Broome County Legislature to include this reallocation of funds in the 2018 county budget through an amendment to the hotel motel fund policy. The coalition should also include local nonprofits and incubators, such as the Broome County Urban League and Southern Tier Startup Alliance, and consult with the Broome County Industrial Development Agency.

## End Notes

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# Protecting Detroit's Taxpayers: Stadium Finance Reform Through An Excise Tax

By Joseph Stabile, Roosevelt @ Georgetown

## Thesis

Detroit should adopt an excise tax on any large-scale development project that receives targeted subsidies from state or local governments in order to discourage these schemes and raise funds for the city's struggling emergency services, health care, and education systems.

## Background Analysis

In April 2016, Dan Gilbert, real estate mogul and owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers, along with Tom Gores, owner of the Detroit Pistons, presented a joint project to invest \$1 billion in a sports and entertainment district in downtown Detroit. The proposal includes a new sports stadium in order to attract a Major League Soccer team to the city.<sup>1</sup> Gilbert's stated intent is to revitalize an area damaged by economic turmoil and the bankruptcy of the municipality in 2013.<sup>2</sup> For that project, a special bill was passed by the state of Michigan to enhance the ability of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) of Detroit to capture property taxes of residents in a specific downtown area and direct the funds towards the new stadium.<sup>3</sup> This bill funneled roughly \$280 million of taxpayer money into the Red Wings' arena, and the money seized by the DDA caused a shortfall in city and county budgets; most notably in the state's School Aid Fund.<sup>4</sup> Considering the history of Detroit's public services financing, and the limited economic gains of a new sports stadium for the city, the use of taxpayer money should be limited for Gilbert and Gores's plan.<sup>5</sup>

## Talking Points

- The consensus among academic studies remains that there is no positive correlation between the construction of sports stadiums and local economic development or income growth.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2012, the Michigan Legislature authorized the redirection of school-tax funds to economic development plans, resulting in \$12.8 million worth of Michigan's School Aid Fund being funneled into stadium construction costs.<sup>7</sup>
- In Michigan especially, economic development plans do not outpace projected job creation figures. Only 2.3 percent of economic development deals from the Michigan Economic Authority have exceeded job creation estimates.<sup>8</sup>

## KEY FACTS

- In 2014, the year construction of the Red Wings' arena began, 665 jobs were cut from the Detroit Public Schools' annual budget while its deficit increased by \$6 million.<sup>14</sup>
- Sixty-one percent of the \$53 billion (2012 USD) spent on sports stadiums from 1909 to 2012 came at the expense of taxpayers.<sup>15</sup>
- Dan Gilbert, multibillionaire businessman, has reportedly proposed the creation of a \$1 billion MLS stadium that would coincide with a legislative package allowing the further exploitation of taxpayer

## Policy Idea

Drawing on former U.S. Congressman David Minge's Distorting Subsidies Limitation Act, this policy would enact an excise tax on those who derive benefits from targeted subsidies.<sup>9</sup> The prevalence of these subsidies in Detroit has drained the funds of public schools and other critical public services. By enforcing this tax on gains from ventures supported by targeted subsidies, Detroit would replenish these depleted funds. This policy could be executed through ballot measure, in accordance with recent



precedent in Detroit tax policy.<sup>10</sup> This means of implementation could be initiated either through public petitions or City Council member sponsorship.

### Policy Analysis

Previous calls to action in regard to the alarming patterns of stadium financing in Michigan have largely revolved around policy in the state legislature. While these efforts are made with earnest intention, the reality is that, in its current state, Michigan's legislature is doing more to exploit taxpayers than help them when it comes to stadium financing. Most recently, a bipartisan proposal was made to redirect state sales and income taxes to economic development projects such as stadium construction.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, statewide efforts to curb taxpayer funding of economic development fail. In particular, community benefit agreements would likely be unable to materialize at the statewide level. Furthermore, even if such agreements could be obtained, there is no guarantee of job creation or appropriate allocation of funds.<sup>12</sup> The creation of a tax through ballot measure would empower the same citizens who have been routinely exploited in the past.<sup>13</sup> Based on the unstable history of other proposed policies and Michigan legislature's recent support for expanding taxpayer funding of economic development projects, the implementation of an excise tax will be the most effective method of protecting Detroit taxpayers and their public services.

### Next Steps

Neil deMause, prominent journalist and outspoken critic of publicly financed stadiums, could be targeted as an ally to publicize this policy's benefits to the people of Detroit. Further, local professor Frank Rashid, who has experience testifying in front of Congress on issues of stadium finance, could lend academic credibility to this measure. In order to get this measure on the ballot, the policy must be either petitioned for by the public or sponsored by a member of the City Council. Reaching out to community groups such as the Sugar Law Center will be necessary to garner general support for this policy. Once placed on the ballot, these groups and others can be used to attain the popular backing necessary to pass the policy into law.

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# *Establishing Support Programs at Michigan Universities to Combat Precarious Housing and Homelessness in College Students*

By Yosef Gross and Ryan Bergal, Roosevelt @ U of Michigan

## **Thesis**

To address growing housing instability in college students, institutions of higher education in the state of Michigan should develop assistance programs that provide academic support, mentoring services, and housing aid.

## **Background Analysis**

When data was last collected in 2013, 58,000 college students identified as homeless on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), an increase of 75 percent over the previous 3 years, and experts estimate that the full number is significantly larger<sup>1</sup>. While research hasn't been conducted on a state level, homeless students have found it increasingly difficult to meet rising costs of tuition<sup>2</sup> and room and board at public colleges in Michigan. To generate sufficient income, many students are forced to work multiple jobs<sup>3</sup>, leading them to fall behind academically. Furthermore, full-time students are ineligible to live in residences that qualify for low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC), which is the largest program for providing affordable housing in the United States today<sup>4</sup>. Section 8 housing, which students can qualify for, labels grant aid for educational expenses as income, often forcing students to decline it in favor of loans so as to maintain eligibility<sup>5</sup>.

After cases of homelessness emerged at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Wayne State University last year, EMU's Mentorship Access Guidance in College (MAGIC) program received \$50,000 in donations and media coverage of the issue surged<sup>6</sup>. However, across the country and in Michigan in particular, university support programs are still understaffed and underfunded<sup>7</sup> or don't exist at all. Many rely completely on private donations, as is the case with both Wayne State and EMU<sup>8</sup>.

## **Talking Points**

- College students facing homelessness have to work multiple jobs to meet rising costs of attendance, affecting their academic performance<sup>9</sup>.
- Colleges should provide more advising for students facing housing insecurity to assist them in using all available resources.
- The largest source of assistance for homeless Americans is the low-income housing tax credit, but college students are ineligible for the program<sup>10</sup>.

## **KEY FACTS**

- High income youth are six times more likely to earn a college degree than low income youth<sup>19</sup>.
- At least 58,000 college students are homeless<sup>20</sup>.
- On a national level, major gaps exist on the level of research and statistics generated on student housing and its role in academic success in higher education; FAFSA just started asking applicants if they were homeless in 2013 and the first study on college student homelessness in the country was published in 2016<sup>21</sup>.
- The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is the federal government's primary program for the development of affordable rental housing for low-income households, financing more than 2.4 million affordable rental-housing units for low-income households; however, full-time college students are ineligible to live in housing sponsored through LIHTC<sup>22</sup>.

## Policy Idea

Although housing subsidies are granted on a federal level, colleges and universities in the State of Michigan can increase funding for academic support programs<sup>11</sup>. This funding would come from the Michigan State Legislature, either through an increase in the state's school aid fund or through a reallocation of the fund's budget. In addition, public and private colleges in Michigan should sponsor research aimed at uncovering the pervasiveness of homelessness in students of their institutions and establish programs offering mentorship services, housing assistance, and academic support.

## Policy Analysis

Passing a bill in the Michigan legislature would greatly expand access to housing assistance for homeless college students. Increased funding for public colleges and universities should be appropriated to create more affordable housing options. Even though the majority of college students live off-campus—only 13.2 percent of undergraduate students live on-campus<sup>12</sup>—expanding on-campus housing will be more effective. In fact, as more college students move to off-campus housing, market rents generally increase<sup>13</sup>.

By providing academic support as well as financial assistance for students with precarious housing, colleges will also increase academic performance and graduation rates<sup>14</sup>. Programs like this are already working. In 2012, campus officials at Florida State University formed the Unconquered Scholars (US) academic mentoring program under the Center for Academic and Retention Enhancement and 43 of 45 students in the first class graduated<sup>15</sup>.

Establishing programs similar to the one at FSU wouldn't add to the costs of a college. No additional funding would be needed; instead, existing services could be combined and geared toward homeless college students. Kennesaw State University's Campus, Awareness, Resource, and Empowerment Center, for example, used resources aimed at high-need students to provide support for its homeless students<sup>16</sup>.

## Next Steps

Support for this expansion and reorganization must come from the counseling and psychology services already in place on many campuses. In order to gain support for this initiative, students and local community members must be aware of the challenges that homeless students face. Highlighting instances of homelessness on college campuses and attracting greater media attention through newspaper articles and rallies should increase support.

Gaining additional funding for academic support programs from the Michigan State Legislature may be challenging. College students who were in foster care at the age of 13 or older are eligible for the Fostering Future Scholarship<sup>17</sup>, but the state would be hesitant to allocate additional funds towards college scholarships. The Michigan Governor, Congress, and Senate all have favored increases in performance-based funding to state universities, but decreases in total scholarship and financial aid funding for the 2016-2017 fiscal year<sup>18</sup>.

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# Making Higher Education More Affordable: A Cap on College Athletics Subsidies

By Jonas Higbee, *Roosevelt @ Michigan State*

## Thesis

In order to prevent students from being unreasonably charged for unprofitable athletics programs, the Michigan Legislature should pass a law placing a cap on the amount of public university money that can be spent on athletics subsidies.

## Background Analysis

While college athletics programs do derive revenue in the form of tickets sales, donations, media rights, branding, and other sources<sup>1</sup>, in most cases that revenue is not enough to pay for the operating costs of the athletics program<sup>2</sup>. Colleges must therefore rely on a combination of student fees<sup>3</sup> and diverting money from elsewhere in the university's budget in order to subsidize their athletics programs<sup>4</sup>. Due to the competitive nature of college sports, universities feel the need to increase their athletics spending in order to keep their teams competitive<sup>5</sup>. This has naturally created an increase in athletics spending over time and therefore an ever-increasing athletics subsidy and an ever-increasing financial burden on college students.

There has also been a decrease in public funding for colleges and universities over the past decade, which has caused many public universities to increase tuition and student fees.<sup>6</sup> This means that students play an increasing role in paying for these growing athletics subsidies, which further increases student debt.

## Talking Points

- In a time of ever-increasing student debt, universities should be frugal when devoting money to athletics programs
- A cap on per student cost of athletic subsidies would allow for the benefits of college athletics, while preventing students from being unduly financially burdened
- College athletics programs would be free to reduce athletics spending or increase athletics revenue however they feel fit

## Policy Idea

The Michigan Legislature should place a cap on the amount of public university money that can be spent on athletics subsidies based on per student cost. A cap of \$700 would be approximately equal to the median per-student subsidy in 2014,<sup>7</sup> though any cap could be helpful, depending on how aggressively the legislature is willing to pursue the goal.

## Policy Analysis

Excluding Michigan State University and the University of Michigan, whose athletics subsidies are minimal to begin with,<sup>8</sup> all public universities within Michigan have seen multimillion-dollar increases in athletics subsidies between 2005 and 2015. This is most prominent at Western Michigan University, where there was an 82 percent

## KEY FACTS

- 11 out of 13 public university athletics programs in Michigan derive over two-thirds of their revenue from athletics subsidies<sup>12</sup>
- Lake Superior State, Eastern Michigan, Western Michigan, Michigan Tech, and Northern Michigan all spent over \$900 per student on athletics subsidies in 2014<sup>13</sup>
- Student fees, a major source of funding for athletics, are projected to increase at a rate 13 percent higher than tuition.<sup>14</sup>

increase during this time-frame.<sup>9</sup> Student fees, largely paying for athletics, are projected to increase at a rate 13 percent higher than tuition.<sup>10</sup> This shows that athletics subsidies are growing, and even a moderate cap instituted now would be beneficial in the future.

While collegiate sports are in most cases financially burdensome to the student body, they do provide many tangible benefits to the university: developing a unified university culture, promoting fitness and teamwork among student athletes, increasing the school's reputation (thus increasing applications to the school), and encouraging continued alumni involvement in university events.<sup>11</sup> Given these benefits of college athletics programs, a limited athletics subsidy is completely reasonable; a public university is not a for-profit business, so not everything it does needs to be profitable. Because of this, a cap on athletics subsidies is preferable to elimination.

### Next Steps

A coalition of university students and faculty across Michigan, particularly from Lake Superior State, Eastern Michigan, and Western Michigan (the schools with the three highest per student subsidies)<sup>15</sup> should be developed to advocate for the policy. Some groups, such as the Center for College Affordability have already published studies on the cost of college athletics, and could likely provide support<sup>16</sup>.

The Michigan House of Representatives Education Reform Committee, chaired by Tim Kelly, should be contacted about the policy. The committee (and legislature as a whole) is predominantly Republican, so advocacy for the policy should emphasize how reducing athletics subsidies is in line with their free-market values.

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# Modern Literacy: Teaching Elementary Students How to Code

By Denizhan Pak and Mickayla Stogsdill, *Roosevelt @ U of Tennessee*

## Thesis

The Knox County School district should add coding classes to their elementary school curriculum in order to help its students succeed in the modern world.

## Background Analysis

Since the introduction of personal computers, daily life functions have changed significantly. The sheer number of personal computers has grown rapidly, reaching well over two billion globally in the past five years<sup>1</sup>. When the printing press was first introduced, there was a mass surge in literacy<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, the tremendous amount of information that has become accessible thanks to the internet precedes a change in the knowledge base of the general public. With computer usage as high and frequent as it is, it is important for the next generation to understand how the systems that are so ubiquitous work and how to best utilize them.

As with most other tool sets, computer science is taught best when learned at a young age<sup>3</sup>. Given its location and resources, Knox county is in a unique position to initiate the kind of change that should be implemented across the country. The Knox County School District has a budget of nearly four-hundred fifty million<sup>4</sup>, with well over 500 computers per school in the district<sup>5</sup>. They can easily start implementing a new approach to spreading technological literacy through an elementary computer coding curriculum. That will be implemented to teach problem solving and coding.

## Talking Points

- Teaching skills technical that can be used professionally can give opportunities to students who cannot afford higher level education.
- Allowing students to learn about computer programming early on would diversify the students that proceed to learn about the topic in higher education, giving opportunities to underrepresented students<sup>6</sup>.
- Programming can teach a variety of general problem solving skills that can be applied in many other fields<sup>7</sup>.

## Policy Idea

Knox County School District should implement coding classes at the elementary school level. This will be done by teaching introductory “Boolean Logic” in math classes in the first grade. Teaching a class in problem solving using logical expressions and programming inspired games for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade levels. Teaching introductory programming using easy syntax languages such as python in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade levels. With more in depth and theoretical classes being taught in addition to more complex languages such as C++ and Java in later grades.

## KEY FACTS

- Computer systems design is expected to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> fastest growing industry for the next decade<sup>9</sup>
- If 1% of female middle school students learned how to code it would be estimated to triple the number of females in the industry<sup>10</sup>
- Half of all high pay jobs in the United States require knowledge of coding<sup>11</sup> and it is expected to increase

## Policy Analysis

Due to the relationship of logical problem solving and programming, this policy would teach lifelong abilities at a young age. Since computer science is taught only in higher level curriculums, there is an exaggerated difference between white male computer science students and students of other racial and gender groups. This policy would support the diversification of opportunity for female children and minority children in Knox County School District by giving them an opportunity to explore a field in which they are members of underrepresented groups.

The implementation of the curriculum will be the only difficulty. One benefit of the implementation by the Knox County School district is their wide range of access to computers in schools. To simplify this Knox County can use some of the many resources available for teaching coding and programming to younger students. These resources include free curriculums and free workshops that are open to all public school teachers by organization such as Code.org<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to benefits to the students and ease of implementation for the district, the program will also benefit Knoxville as a whole. As a growing technological center, it is imperative for schools in the district to teach their students skills that can benefit the city as a whole.

### Next Steps

To accomplish all of this the Knox County School district must be lobbied. The School District should be presented with a working version of the curriculum that will be influenced by the University of Tennessee Computer Science Department. The program will be presented to the school board. Pending their approval there will be a campaign to present the policy to students and parents that would explain and help with the transition.

Once classes begin to be taught at the elementary school levels, expanded curriculums should be introduced to upper level grades. Students in middle school and high school would be required to take programming classes with similar levels of complexity as Algebra or Geometry. Additionally, Knox County can work with the University of Tennessee Computer Science department to allow students to have easy access to higher level computer science education resources especially for under privileged students. These classes would involve abstract problem solving, website design, application design and general logical thinking that can be directly applied to the real world. Once Knox County demonstrates the success of this program, it can be used as a model to be implemented at the state level.

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# *Integrated Peace Education: A New Approach to Addressing Bullying*

By Vishnu Kannan, *Roosevelt @ Michigan State University*

## **Thesis**

To address school bullying, the Michigan State Board of Education should require public high schools to offer an alternative to the ninth-grade world history requirement that analyzes theories and applications of nonviolence and various causes of conflict, in order to provide students with the skills to mediate conflict in their daily lives.

## **Background Analysis**

Bullying is defined as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time”.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, bullying negatively impacts mental health, substance use and suicide.<sup>2</sup> In Michigan public schools, bullying is a major issue. The state government has attempted to address the problem, notably in 2011 when they passed the “revised school code” requiring public schools to, amongst other things, “adopt and implement a policy prohibiting bullying at school” and mandating schools to report bullying data to the state.<sup>3</sup> However, this legislation failed to make a significant impact on the problem.<sup>4</sup> In fact, a study conducted in 2016 ranked Michigan as the worst state in the country for bullying with 25% of high school students reporting bullying on school property and 19% reporting being bullied online.<sup>5</sup> Notably, although the revised code creates accountability structures to deal with incidents of bullying and requires some bullying prevention education, it does not go far enough to provide students with the tools to resolve conflict nonviolently. Additionally, classes such as ninth-grade world history glorify military success, reinforcing a societal tendency to conflate “civic virtue” with the use of force to “subdue adversaries”, an idea to which youth are particularly susceptible.<sup>6</sup> This proposal provides a solution which makes use of the ninth-grade world history requirement as a medium for anti-bullying education.

## **Talking Points**

- Michigan is ranked as the worst state in the country for bullying, despite numerous attempts at anti-bullying legislation.<sup>7</sup>
- Currently history classes glorify victory in war and regularly display the failures and ignore the successes of diplomatic, nonviolent methods.
- Integrating peace education with mandatory history curricula would provide students with conflict resolution skills and historical examples that testify to the success of nonviolent conflict resolution.

## **KEY FACTS**

- 25% of Michigan high school students report being bullied on school property.<sup>13</sup>
- 19% of Michigan high school students report being cyberbullied.<sup>14</sup>

## **Policy Idea**

The State of Michigan should require that public high schools provide an alternative class to the ninth grade world history requirement which adapts the current world history curricula to examine the nature of major conflicts throughout world history from the perspectives of noted intellectuals such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, etc. Additionally, teachers would craft lessons and coursework designed to help students apply the principles of nonviolence to current events and their everyday lives.

## Policy Analysis

Peace education has been proposed as a solution to numerous social and international problems throughout history. In the past, its purpose has been to balance school curriculum due to the militaristic nature of education, particularly during the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Although schools are no longer as militaristic as they were, world history curriculum continues to reinforce the societal value placed on force as a response to conflict.<sup>9</sup> The state content expectations support this ideology in the structure they require for 9th grade world history. The curriculum is divided into eras, each of which focuses on a war and its aftermath. For example, the era entitled “Global Crisis and Achievement, 1900-1945” is followed by “The Cold War and its Aftermath”.<sup>10</sup> This juxtaposition implies that the 20th century was defined by the World Wars and the Cold War, the focus on which ignores massive nonviolent movements around the world and tangible advances towards international peace with the formation of organizations like the United Nations.

Peace education resists the narrative that humans must respond to conflict, and by extension difference, with force alone. A curriculum integrating a study of the principles of nonviolence with a study of history will have a twofold effect. Firstly, it will expose students to theories of nonviolence in an academic setting, allowing them to analyze the principles of nonviolence and determine for themselves whether, or not, they agree. This is important given the high price of peace education at the collegiate level. If not in grade school, it is likely students will never be exposed to these ideas in an academic setting.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, peace education challenges the glorification of violence by providing examples in which nonviolence has successfully and nobly been used as a response to conflict. Moreover, the characteristics of historical conflicts in which nonviolence has been employed, mirror those of bullying. They almost always involve a “real or perceived power imbalance” and are generally repeated over time.<sup>12</sup> Understanding how proponents of nonviolence converted their principles into tangible results can inspire students to emulate the strength in nonviolence and tolerance of the figures they study.

Together, these effects provide students with a set of conflict mediation tools, proving to them that nonviolence works. Importantly, this program is intended to supplement existing structural initiatives to address bullying, including existing accountability and enforcement structures. One cannot overstate the importance of teachers continuing to play an active role in addressing bullying, however, this paper advocates for the state to consider a more diverse approach, involving students, to help address the challenges of participating in a complex academic community.

### Next Steps

The stakeholders for such a policy are peace educators, members of the Michigan State Board of Education, members of district school boards, teachers, parents, and students. The first step is to create a specific curriculum for both semester and trimester school systems by contacting prominent peace educators and some of the academic reviewers of the current state content expectations. After creating curriculum, the following step would be to gather support from members of Ann Arbor and Northville school boards, who have already expressed interest in the concept of integrating peace education with history courses. These two districts are promising cases for a pilot program which would help refine curriculum. Following refinement, one would need to present drafts and recommendations from experts to the state board of education.

## End Notes

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# Helping Homeless College Students By Providing Access to Showering Facilities

By Yiju Huang and Dominic Russel, *Roosevelt @ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

## Thesis

There are at least 55,000 homeless college students in the U.S., and while it is difficult to document, we know the trend is growing.<sup>1</sup> In Michigan, there have been numerous reported cases of homelessness, which hamper student success. The University of Michigan can combat this by providing its homeless students access to showering facilities.

## Background Analysis

The 2016 annual tuition for an in-state student at the University of Michigan is \$28,776, including \$10,246 for room and board.<sup>2</sup> The current trend suggests it will continue to become more expensive, considering that room and board fees have increased 54 percent in the past 20 years.<sup>3</sup> The current Michigan minimum wage, at \$8.50,<sup>4</sup> makes it impossible for undergraduate students—working without a college degree—to afford these expenses, even working full-time. Poverty-related issues such as lack of affordable housing, job loss, and eviction are often the root cause of student homelessness.<sup>5</sup>

There is no good estimate of the number of homeless students in Michigan, but there have been numerous reported cases of homelessness at Michigan universities. According to FAFSA, there are currently about 58,000 college students who are homeless.<sup>6</sup> Homeless students are more likely to repeat grades, drop out, or be expelled;<sup>7</sup> they also suffer from mental and psychological stress such as anxiety prior to interviews and show symptoms like cold, flu, and body aches.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, research shows that housing conditions have no correlation to a student's academic performance.<sup>9</sup> Homeless students also show a high regard for higher education.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, research suggests that these students tend to drop out because of a shortcoming in perception: Either homeless students do not believe an adequate support system exists, or they lack the awareness of resources available to help them attend college.<sup>11</sup>

## Talking Points

- The University of Michigan can reach out to homeless students by providing them access to its showering facilities.
- Providing basic needs to homeless students can alter their perception about the lack of help on campus—and make them more likely to get help.
- These services would allow homeless students to meet one another, allowing them to foster inclusive communities.

## Policy Idea

The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor should offer UM homeless students not enrolled in exercise classes access to its showering facilities on campus.<sup>12</sup> Students would fill out a

## KEY FACTS

- Michigan is one of the states most affected by the Great Recession.<sup>20</sup>
- In Michigan, 15–20 percent of college students work full-time.<sup>21</sup>
- Forty percent of students from low-income families go to college, but only 12 percent graduate by age 24.<sup>22</sup>
- The maximum Pell Grant for 2016–17 is \$5,815, not enough to cover tuition cost.<sup>23</sup>

request to the Office of Financial Aid, which would determine if the student is eligible. Once eligibility is determined, students could then go to an ID issuing station on campus to acquire a special ID to gain access to these facilities. Literature relating to campus resources and nonprofit organizations (CAPS, Friends in Deed, Power, Inc.) would be made available at these showering facilities.

### Policy Analysis

Students who are homeless are often an underreported population.<sup>13</sup> The University of Michigan can reach many of these students indirectly by providing them access to its showering facilities. Right now, homeless students cannot use the showering facilities on campus residential buildings nor at campus exercising facilities without proper ID.<sup>14</sup> Research suggests that homeless youths are more likely to commit crime when they lack access to provide for their basic needs.<sup>15</sup> The research also recommended a gradual process of building trust with homeless youth through actions such as opening access to showering.<sup>16</sup>

In California, a bill requiring community colleges to allow homeless students access to its showering facilities was recently passed. It is currently being implemented by 113 community colleges in California.<sup>17</sup> Other locales, both in the U.S., such as D.C., New Mexico, and Hawaii, and outside the U.S., such as the Vatican, are adopting a similar idea by financing “mobile showers”—buses that provide free showering—in the interest of public health and the individual.<sup>18</sup> In San Francisco, Lava Mae is one such nonprofit that finances these mobile showers. Each bus provides 500 showers per day for \$100 every four days,<sup>19</sup> or about \$9,125 annually.

### Next Steps

Ultimately, the University of Michigan administrators would have to change the rule to allow homeless students greater access to campus resources. We will build a coalition among existing student organizations to lobby for this change. In seeking out homeless students, we have contacted the Balvin Scholars Project at the University of Michigan. This program recruits students who have experienced foster care or are homeless and helps them to access resources such as counseling, workshops, and financial aid. The program has liaisons at the Michigan Department of Human and Health Services and at the University of Michigan Financial Aid Office, which oversees students' FAFSA applications to identify those in need of housing.<sup>24</sup> We will also work with representatives in the University's Central Student Government to introduce a referendum and demonstrate student support behind this issue. We have already contacted the MAGIC program at Eastern Michigan University, a similar program to the Balvin Scholars Program,<sup>25</sup> to get a better understanding of their programs and the costs of implementing them.

### End Notes

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# Mental Health Matters: Increasing Access to Treatment in New York City Schools

By Sacha Heyman, *Roosevelt @ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

## Thesis

The New York City Council should combat adolescent mental illness in the city by passing a law allowing public high school students to receive mental healthcare at school-based clinics without being forced to obtain parental permission.

## Background Analysis

New York City teenagers are currently experiencing a mental health crisis. Over a quarter of NYC public high school students report feeling persistently sad or hopeless over the past year—a predictor of depression<sup>1</sup>. An alarming 8 percent of NYC public high schoolers report attempting suicide, a number that doubles among LGBTQ youth<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, among all age groups in NYC, mental illness disproportionately affects low-income, overwhelmingly non-white people, while receipt of treatment is lower among African Americans, Latinos, and Asians<sup>3</sup>. Mental illness also imposes a significant financial cost: NYC experiences economic losses of \$14.2 billion in annual lost productivity due to depression and substance misuse<sup>4</sup>.

The need for childhood mental health treatment is clear, as half of all adult mental health problems nationwide begin before the age of 14, and 75 percent begin before the age of 24<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, it is estimated that 80 percent of children nationally who need mental health services do not receive them<sup>6</sup>. A large deterrent to seeking care is stigma, especially for racial and ethnic minorities, who often receive care at lower rates<sup>7</sup>. NYC currently has school-based mental health (SBMH) clinics in 58 high schools, with services provided by outside health care providers<sup>9</sup>. However, to access these clinics, students must first receive parental consent<sup>10</sup>.

## Talking Points

- Alarmingly high numbers of New York City public high school students report feeling depressed or attempting suicide
- For a large number of New York youth, mental illness stems from adverse family experiences.
- Although many NYC public high schools offer school-based mental health clinics, students must receive parent consent before accessing these clinics, which may serve as a significant deterrent to receipt of care.
- By removing the parental consent requirement, more students battling mental illness would be able to access school-based mental health care.

## Policy Idea

Currently, New York City public high school students must obtain parental consent before accessing mental health treatment at SBMH clinics. The New York City Council should pass a bill to remove the parental consent requirement for high schoolers. SBMH treatment would continue to be provided by outside providers, who would offer the same services they

## KEY FACTS

- Among NYC public high school students, 27 percent report feeling depressed, while 8 percent report attempting suicide. In Michigan, 15–20 percent of college students work full-time.<sup>13</sup>
- Eighteen percent of minors in New York State experience two or more adverse family events during their childhood, a common predictor of future mental illness.<sup>14</sup>
- Nationally, 80 percent of students who need mental health treatment do not receive it enough to cover tuition cost.<sup>15</sup>

currently do, without any clinics being opened or closed as a result of this law

## Policy Analysis

New York State law allows minors (aged 17 or younger) to access mental health care without parental permission if a parent or guardian either is not available or has refused to give consent, or if their involvement would be detrimental to the treatment<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, in New York State, 18 percent of minors endure at least two adverse family experiences (instances of emotional abuse and/or maltreatment in the family environment) during childhood, a predictor of poor future mental health<sup>12</sup>. For students whose mental illness stems at least partly from adverse family experiences, parental involvement would potentially be detrimental to health care treatment—if they were to provide consent at all. Current state law enables students who fit this description to receive care without having to inform their parents, but erroneously, NYC does not provide this option to students seeking care through SBMH clinics. Instead, those students may be refused consent by their parents, or may decline to ask their parents due to the stigma surrounding mental health. That must change. While it may be ideal for high school students to involve their parents in their mental health treatment, for students whose parents may actually be an obstacle to treatment, the priority must be getting them access to care. That means removing the parental consent requirement.

This policy change would not cost anything. SBMH clinics are already in place throughout the city, with services provided by outside sources, who bill families' insurance plans directly. Therefore, schools would not have to financially respond to any change in SBMH clinic use by students.

## Next Steps

In 2015, New York City began an intensive effort to improve mental health throughout the city. As such, this is a government that is actively invested in improving mental health, and therefore might be receptive to this policy change. However, passing this legislation will require the support of those who would be directly affected by this: students, guardians, and faculty. Therefore, it will be imperative to reach out to School Leadership Teams—which are comprised of the aforementioned stakeholders—to support this legislation. Additionally, influential community groups such as the Ansonia Democrats will be asked to support this legislation. The support of these groups can be leveraged to urge members of the Council's Committee on Education—such as Helen Rosenthal and Mark Levine, both of whom represent the neighborhood where the Ansonia Democrats operate—to support the legislation, too.

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# *Integrating Special and General Education in Fairfax County Public Schools*

By Ariana Zukergood, *Roosevelt @ Cornell University*

## **Thesis**

To address Fairfax County's segregation of special and general education departments, the local government should pass legislation that funds teacher training for integrated classrooms and mandates enrollment of every high school student in at least one integrated class yearly.

## **Background Analysis**

As a minority group, people with disabilities have been marginalized citizens throughout U.S. history. When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) passed in 1990, conditions improved drastically for people with disabilities in the United States; however, there is still significant segregation of special and general education. This distinct separation is increasingly evident in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and promotes a societal stigma around disability that creates unconscious bias among non-disabled students. Furthermore, the separation of the departments leaves disabled students at a disadvantage regarding social exposure, employment opportunities, and higher education options. This division of public schools impacts not only current students, but all FCPS teachers and the families of disabled students.

Although Fairfax County previously attempted to address this polarization through directives such as Programs for Children with Disabilities (Directive #2670), the systematic breakdown of this policy lies in its indirect, supplementary approach. While supplementary programs are beneficial, the real solution to fighting the social stigma of disability among young people in United States will be found in actual integration. Ultimately, integration will normalize the concept of disability for students, thereby rendering obsolete the unconscious bias that currently dominates employment and higher education decisions.

## **Talking Points**

- Lawmakers should mandate integration by requiring every high school student to enroll in at least one combined class per year
- Integration would result in increase in better employment and higher education opportunities for disabled individuals
- Advocates should focus on progressing the United States' disability model to further encapsulate the ideals of the social model

## **Policy Idea**

My proposal is for the Fairfax County local government to mandate that high school students enroll in at least one integrated class yearly as a graduation requirement. The government should make this possible by funding the

## **KEY FACTS**

- On average, disabled employees receive \$478 from Supplement Security Income payouts<sup>2</sup>
- A survey of 255 supervisors of disabled workers found that disabled employees perform at least as well as and usually better than<sup>3</sup> their non-disabled coworkers
- The cost of most accommodations for disabled workers is below \$500, yet the costs of turnover to a company are between 30 and 50 percent of entry-level employees' annual salaries, suggesting that it is cost effective to make reasonable accommodations.<sup>4</sup>



training of teachers to prepare them to handle integrated classrooms. This would ensure sustained equal education and a more equitable level of preparation for employment and higher education. Furthermore, this policy would simultaneously decrease the next generation's level of unconscious bias toward disabled people and entail positive economic externalities.

## Policy Analysis

This policy would normalize disability and integrate the lives of future generations while increasing higher education and employment opportunities for disabled individuals.

In the long run, the opportunities produce both local and national economic benefits through a decreased unemployment rate and a decrease in turnover for local businesses. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, out of the entire 2015 civilian non-institutional population there was a 5.1 percent unemployment rate for persons without disabilities and a 10.7 percent unemployment rate for disabled persons, which indicates that increasing the employment of disabled citizens would yield a lower unemployment rate nationally. Furthermore, the case study of SunTrust's proactive hiring of disabled individuals reports that "after hiring the first employee with a disability, the manager found that employee morale and productivity had increased and turnover had noticeably decreased,"<sup>1</sup> substantiating the economic benefits to local businesses.

Previously, the government instituted a quota system for specified employers to hire more disabled workers. However, this not only is ineffective, as the unemployment rate of disabled individuals is still twice that of non-disabled workers, but also targets the symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself. This policy would make a quota unnecessary by better preparing disabled individuals for long-term employment.

## Next Steps

The FCPS School Board must initiate the aforementioned high school graduation requirement and lobby for the county government to provide funding for training of teachers in preparation for integrated classrooms. However, all families and friends of disabled students, disabled citizens living in the county, FCPS teachers, and taxpayers must attend school board meetings and write to their representatives in support of this policy in order to ensure its implementation. Specifically, these allies should target School Board Member at Large Ryan McElveen, who has previously stood by initiatives to improve the education of disabled students in Fairfax County.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Dispelling Myths." *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 92:18 (2000).

<sup>2</sup> "Why Is It Good For The Economy To Hire People With Disabilities?" *Why Is It Good For The Economy To Hire People With Disabilities?* N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Dispelling Myths." *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 92:18 (2000).

<sup>4</sup> "Why Is It Good For The Economy To Hire People With Disabilities?" *Why Is It Good For The Economy To Hire People With Disabilities?* N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.

# Educating Those at Risk: Spreading Knowledge to Combat the Opioid Epidemic

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## Thesis

In order to combat skyrocketing opioid abuse in New York State, the NYS Education Department should introduce opioid awareness and prevention programs into its mandated health curriculum in the same vein as the 2014 amendments to the Mental Hygiene Act.

## Background Analysis

America, and New York State in particular, is facing an opioid epidemic. While the issue is prevalent in rural communities, it is actually more common in small metropolitan areas, which account for over 20 percent of nonmedical opioid usage.<sup>1</sup> Counties with the highest mortality from opioid use have a high percentage of whites, veterans, and people relying on Social Security and Disability Insurance or reporting poor health. These places tend to have lower median income, lower educational attainment rates, and higher unemployment. Every day in America, more than 650,000 opioid prescriptions are dispensed, and 3,900 people abuse these prescriptions. Seventy-eight people die each day from an opioid overdose. Opioids were historically used to treat very serious injuries and cancer pain, but since 1999 they have become more commonly prescribed for less severe ailments. These treatments are addictive and an estimated 25 percent of people taking opioids to manage pain struggle with dependency.<sup>2</sup> The opioid epidemic must be stopped so the affected communities can recover and thrive. A 2014 law amended the Mental Hygiene Act in New York, establishing a multimedia public education measure regarding opioid abuse through the Department of Health (DOH). The law focuses on the risks of opioid abuse, how to recognize signs of addiction, resources available to cope with addiction, and a brief coverage of the state's Good Samaritan Laws that protect bystanders contacting emergency services in a crisis.

## Talking Points

- The opioid epidemic shows no signs of slowing down.
- Educating people about the dangers of opioids and drug abuse is key to curbing the crisis.
- Amending school curriculums is necessary to spread awareness. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.
- Because a similar New York DOH policy has already been enacted, the resources to expand the policy to the Education Department are already in place.

## Policy Idea

The New York State Education Department should change the health curriculum to emphasize community outreach and advocacy. This change would be similar to amendments made recently to the Mental Hygiene Act in the DOH to combat the opioid epidemic in the Northeast. Public school health curriculums should be revised to

## KEY FACTS

- Opioid overdoses kill 78 people daily.<sup>3</sup>
- One in 25 adults take opioids for chronic pain rather than severe symptoms.
- \$189 million was allocated to addressing the issue in the New York State 2016–17 budget.<sup>4</sup>
- Accidental overdose or suicide resulting from prescription drug abuse kills an American every 19 minute.<sup>5</sup>

convey important information about the opioid crisis, such as signs of addiction, preventative measures such as Naloxone, and New York's Good Samaritan Laws.

### Policy Analysis

This policy should be enacted through the Department of Education to supplement the existing policy of the DOH. The budgetary impact of this policy would be negligible. Many of the resources needed to change the curriculum are already amassed through the DOH's policy, and the majority of work left to do is to adapt the system used in Health to Education. Additionally, this policy would supplement the mere \$189 million allocated to the issue federally for 2017, and would have a significantly larger local impact than the federal spending. This policy would find strength in adopting clauses from the 2014 State Assembly Bill A10120, which planned for a more extensive policy to also address reducing addiction stigma and provided guidelines for annual Commissioner Reports. The mix of A10120 and Mental Hygiene Amendment frameworks will reach massive numbers of people through the public education system and alert them to the dangers of opiates, heading off the crisis before it develops further in the state. Many cities such as Ithaca, New York, haven't had major changes to their drug education curriculum since 1999, and it is high time for the curriculums to adapt and reflect the turbulent circumstances New York State faces today.

### Next Steps

A coalition of Cornell University's most involved groups, such as Cayuga's Watchers and the Drug Information Association Student Chapter, will help us network with relevant people and organizations such as Head Nurse of the Ithaca School District Judy Hoffman, Cornell Initiatives Coordinator Laura Santacrose, and the Drug Policy Alliance. A policy pitched by this support system and backed by petition will bring Ithaca's schools to the table and align with Mayor Svante Myrick's goals of reforming Ithaca's approach to drugs. The mayor would present the proposal to the Ithaca City School District to initiate an update to the drug education curriculum. This updated curriculum would serve as a model when presenting the plan to State Assemblymember Steven Cymbrowitz and the cosponsors of the Mental Hygiene Act Amendments. Through the State Assembly, this plan would become policy statewide.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "A demographer's view of the opioid crisis," Penn State College of Agriculture and Arts, 2 May 2016, <http://aese.psu.edu/nercrd/news/2016/demographers-view-of-the-opioid-crisis>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> New York State Senate. "Senate Passes Package of Bills to Fight Heroin and Opioid Abuse in Communities Statewide." News release, June 16, 2016. The New York State Senate. Accessed November 18, 2016. Senate Passes Package of Bills to Fight Heroin and Opioid Abuse in Communities Statewide.

<sup>4</sup> New York State Assembly. A00304. Albany, New York, 2016.

[http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default\\_fld=&leg\\_video=&bn=A00304&term=2015&Summary=Y&Actions=Y&Memo=Y](http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default_fld=&leg_video=&bn=A00304&term=2015&Summary=Y&Actions=Y&Memo=Y)

