



# JUVENILE CRIME REDUCTION PLAN

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SWEETWATER COUNTY, WYOMING

MARCH 2004

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Submitted by

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# Juvenile Crime Reduction Plan – Executive Summary

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## INTRODUCTION

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This document provides a summary of key information and conclusions of the Juvenile Crime Reduction Plan for Sweetwater County, Wyoming. In preparing this plan, the study team considered numerous issues, including:

1. Who commits juvenile crimes?
2. What types of crimes do they commit?
3. What resources currently exist to combat juvenile crime?
4. Why do juvenile crimes occur?
5. What areas stand out as needs according to local juvenile crime practitioners?

The above information was used to develop a Juvenile Crime Reduction Plan. That plan considers the following:

1. What types of crime offer the most promise for reduction?
2. What unique strengths and weaknesses exist in the current juvenile crime environment in Sweetwater County that can be leveraged or addressed for improvement?
3. What are the cause-and-effect implications of potential plan priorities?

The plan relies on a blend of information: hard data about the types and numbers of juvenile arrests/summons/citations, local demographic patterns, interviews with practitioners in the juvenile crime system in the county, and a literature review of other communities' crime prevention efforts. That data and information is presented in the full report, while this Executive Summary presents only the key findings and recommendations.

## **PHASE ONE. PROBLEM DEFINITION**

The study team conducted an analysis of current juvenile crime in Sweetwater County, including comparisons to adult crime in the county and juvenile crimes in other similarly sized counties. The full report contains many facts regarding crimes, demographics of juvenile offenders, and other issues. Selected key conclusions include the following, in three segments.

### **ENVIRONMENT**

Sweetwater County presents a unique environment for juveniles in many ways. Some of the key factors include:

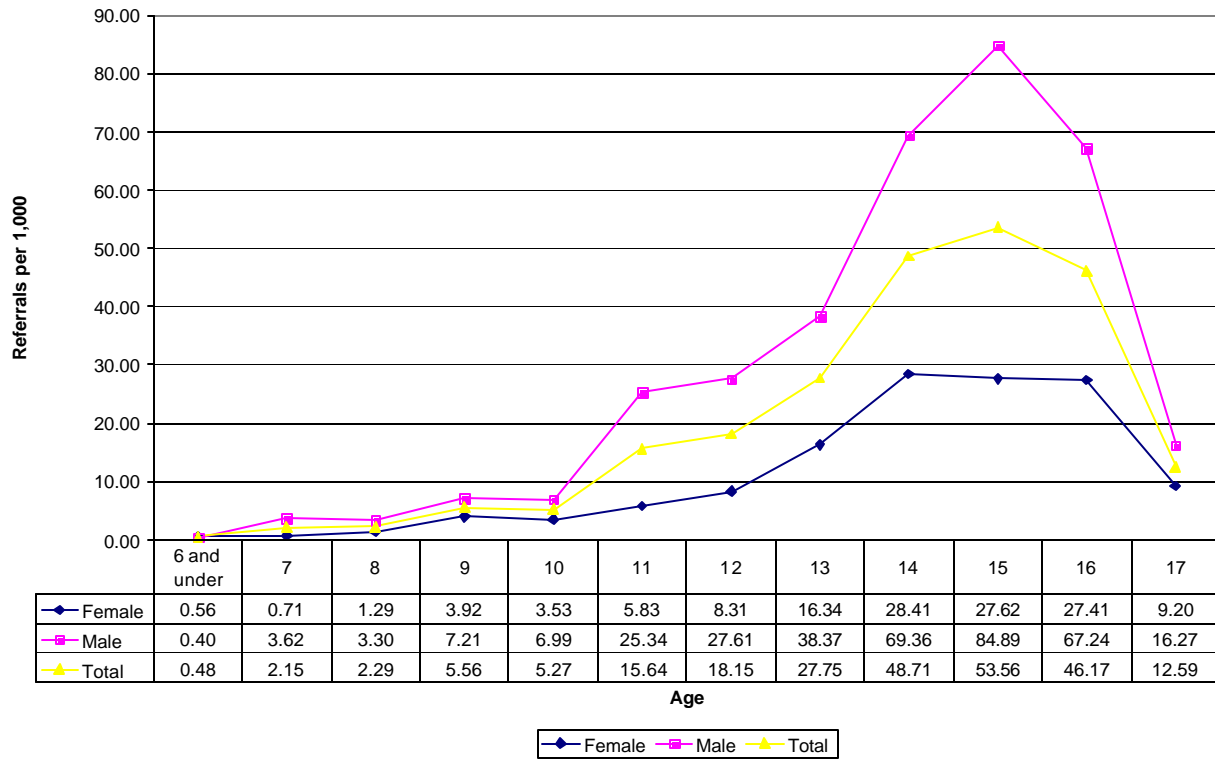
- The bifurcated structure of the county, with two major towns that both require juvenile justice resources.
- The county's geographic isolation from metropolitan areas or even other larger communities, which presents challenges in terms of economy of scale.
- The county's location along Interstate 80, which brings economic benefits but also a more transient population and an entry mode for drugs.
- The predominance of extractive industries in the community, which produces more shift work (and unsupervised youth), more transient labor and households, a more variable economy, and an environment where income does not necessarily correlate with education.

### **CRIME DEMOGRAPHICS**

Based on Juvenile Probation records from mid-1998 through mid-2003 (936 referrals), a profile of juvenile offenders can be developed.

- 70 percent of offenders are male.
- Probation rates increase radically during the teen years, particularly between the ages of 14 and 16.
- Probation rates decrease dramatically for 17 year-olds, but this is probably because some offenders are entering the adult system as an outcome of their offense.
- Males see a dramatic increase between the ages of 10 and 11, and then an enormous increase between the ages of 13 and 14.
- Females see the greatest increase during the ages of 12 and 14.

### Juvenile Referral Rate



### CRIME STATISTICS

A comprehensive source of juvenile arrest/citations/summons data is available through the Uniform Crime Reporting System, which is operated through the Federal Bureau of Investigations with local support. With minor adjustments where necessary, the UCRS provides standardized arrest data across local communities. The analysis provided insights about types of juvenile crime, comparisons between juvenile and adult crime in the county, and comparisons of juvenile crime in Sweetwater County versus other similarly-sized counties in the state, region, and nation.

Key observations about the data are provided in the following paragraphs. Additional observations comparing Sweetwater County to similarly sized counties are offered in the full report.

#### OBSERVATIONS ON JUVENILE CRIME WITHIN THE COUNTY.

1. Curfew violations are the most common juvenile offense.
2. Larceny arrests/summons/citations are the second-most common.
3. Curfew and larceny combined represent nearly 40 percent of juvenile arrests/summons/citations.

4. The top eight offenses – curfew, larceny, disorderly conduct, liquor law, drug possession, runaway, vandalism, and assault – account for 75 percent of juvenile arrests/summons/citations.
5. Serious violent crimes and weapon-related crimes are rare.

#### COMPARISONS OF JUVENILE CRIME AND ADULT CRIME IN THE COUNTY

1. The juvenile arrest/summons/citation rate is actually higher than the adult rate in the county.
2. Larceny, vandalism, and disorderly conduct are more common among juveniles than adults.
3. Curfew violations and runaways are, as expected, juvenile-only offenses.
4. While juveniles are more likely to be arrested for liquor law violations (possibly because the law is more stringent for juveniles), they are much less likely to be arrested for impaired driving.
5. Juveniles are much less likely than adults to commit serious violent crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.
6. Juveniles are more likely than adults to be arrested for property crimes, particularly larceny.

#### COMPARISONS OF JUVENILE CRIME IN SWEETWATER COUNTY VERSUS WYOMING STATE AVERAGES

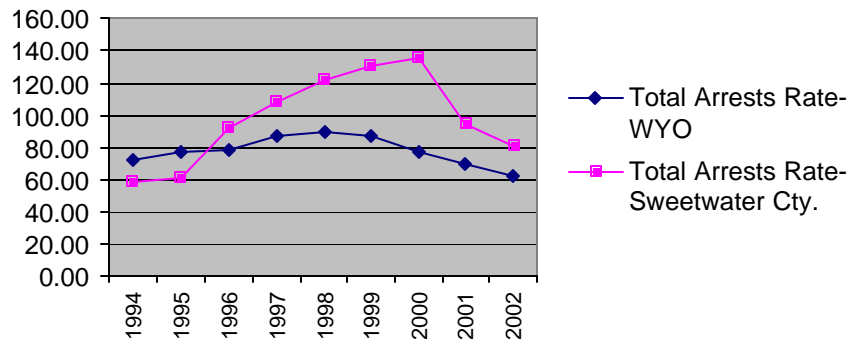
1. The overall Sweetwater County arrest/summons/citation rate of 80.8 per 1,000 is almost 28 percent higher than the average for the state, which is 63.2 per 1,000.
2. Sweetwater County stands at only one-half of the state average for violent crimes.
3. Sweetwater County is slightly below the state average in drug-related arrests/summons/citations.
4. On the other hand, Sweetwater County has a significantly higher property crime rate, driven mostly by a higher larceny/theft rate.
5. In addition to property crime, already discussed, crimes such as vandalism, disorderly conduct, curfew and loitering, and run-aways are more prevalent in Sweetwater County. In terms of curfew and loitering, there were 153 arrests/summons/citations in Sweetwater County in 2003, which was nearly five times the statewide rate.
6. As was seen in the earlier comparison with other Wyoming counties, Sweetwater County has lower crime rates related to DUI's and liquor laws, although the crime rate related to liquor laws is still relatively high at 7.15 arrests/summons/citations per 1,000 compared to rates for other crimes in Sweetwater County.

COMPARISONS OF JUVENILE CRIME IN SWEETWATER COUNTY VERSUS SIMILARLY SIZED COUNTIES IN WYOMING, THE REGION, AND THE NATION

1. Sweetwater County has an above-average crime rate when compared to similarly sized counties.
2. Among the four similarly sized counties in Wyoming, Sweetwater ranks low in terms of violent crime.
3. Sweetwater County ranks very high in terms of property crime, as compared with similarly sized counties.
4. Sweetwater County ranks relatively high in curfew violations.

**ARREST/SUMMONS/CITATION TRENDS (1994 - 2002)**

Trend rates were developed for the past eight years in Sweetwater County. While total juvenile arrest rates in the state of Wyoming remained relatively steady in the nineties and slightly decreased so far in this decade, rates in Sweetwater County increased considerably more rapidly until 2000, and then decreased much more sharply since that time. Even so, the total arrest rate in Sweetwater County remains almost 20 arrests/ summons/ citations per 1,000 higher than the state average.



The trend charts in the full report examine patterns in major categories such as violent crime, property crime, and drug-related crimes.

## PHASE TWO. FUTURE PROJECTIONS

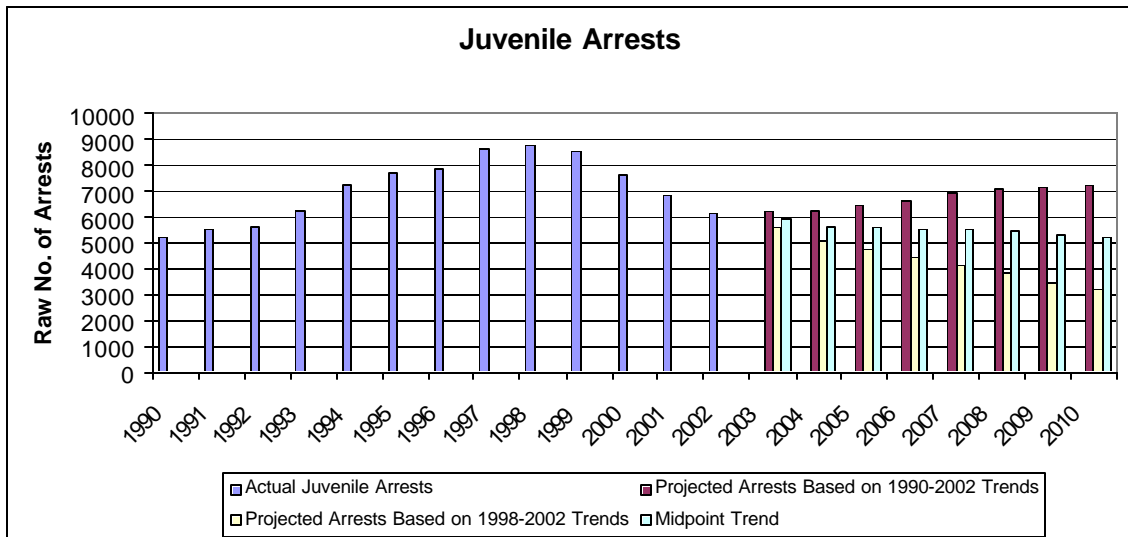
Three issues impact projections of juvenile crime. The first of these is the population of juveniles. Between 2003 and 2010, the population of 12 to 14 year-olds is expected to decline by 12 percent, and the population of 15 to 17 year-olds is expected to decline by 18 percent. This change will dampen juvenile crime rates.

The second factor is the trend in per capita juvenile crime. If the actual crime rate *per juvenile* is increasing or decreasing, or if enforcement intensity is increasing or decreasing, then the reported arrest/summons/citation rate will reflect those factors. From 1990 through 2002, the per capita annual rate has increased from 0.45 per juvenile to 0.71 per juvenile. Per-juvenile rates peaked at 0.90 in 1999 and have declined since that time.

A third issue is policy or resource changes. As shown in the following graph, raw juvenile arrest/ citation/ summons rates rose for several years between 1990 and 1998, then dropped from 1999 through 2002. This pattern implies the addition of some outside factor – e.g., a loss of enforcement resources, a change in the environment, or a new prevention or treatment program – in 1999 that fundamentally changed the trend. The only significant program that was identified as being new in that time frame was the truancy program; it cannot be confirmed in this study whether or not that program was the sole changing force, or whether other policy or resource changes have contributed to the downward trend. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that a major change occurred in 1999 that fundamentally altered the landscape of juvenile crime in the county.

When considering demographic changes and juvenile arrest/citation/summons trends *from 1990 through 2002*, juvenile arrests/citations/summons can be expected to increase by about 2.1 percent per year through 2010 (16 percent total). This is shown by the red bars on the following graph. If the trend from 1998 through 2002 continues in its current form, juvenile arrests/ summons/citations can be expected to decline approximately 7.9 percent per year through 2010 (-43 percent total). This trend is represented by the yellow bars on the graph.

In truth, these two types of projections probably represent outer brackets of the projection. The long-term-based trend (red bars) underestimates the recent declines in juvenile arrests/ summons/citations, and the short-term-based trend (yellow bars) probably overestimates the continued impact of the program or policy changes that caused the 1998-2002 decline. A more reasonable estimate might be the midpoint of the two trends (the turquoise bars). This midpoint projection shows a projected decline of 2.1 percent per year through 2010, or 12 percent total during that time period.



The wildcard in the above estimates is policy – a change in policy either as law or as process can result in huge increases or decreases in arrests, independent of any actual change in crime.

## PHASE THREE. DEFINING PRIORITIES

In this phase of the project, current resources and processes were documented, the crime data were examined from a “big picture” perspective, and the study team interviewed key people involved with youth in Sweetwater County, primarily those involved in aspects of the juvenile justice system. At least one expert/practitioner was interviewed in each major area related to juvenile justice – schools, courts, social services, juvenile probation, juvenile facilities, etc.

### RESOURCES AND PROCESSES

A description of resources for juveniles (as they relate to juvenile justice) was included in the full report, along with an overview of processes through the juvenile justice system. Those data are not included here for brevity.

### PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The study team identified five types of crime that are strong candidates for prioritization in the plan. The priorities are not presented in any particular order.

**Priority A: Larceny/Theft.** This represents 16 percent of all juvenile arrests/ summons/ citations, and is fifty percent more common in Sweetwater County than in the state as a whole.

**Priority B. Curfew Violations.** This represents 24 percent of all juvenile arrests/ summons/ citations, and is five times more common in Sweetwater County than in the state as a whole. It is likely among the more underreported of juvenile crimes as well, and interviewees linked curfew violations with other crimes.

**Priority C. Drug Offenses.** This type of crime represents 6 percent of juvenile arrests/ summons/ citations, but is likely quite underreported. Additionally, drug arrests are increasing at a dramatic rate compared to other types of juvenile crime and, according to many interviewees in the local area, drug use is linked to other crimes.

**Priority D. Liquor Law Violations.** Liquor law violations represent 9 percent of juvenile arrests/ summons/ citations, and are actually significantly less common in Sweetwater County than in the rest of the state. However, they still remain a common reason for juvenile arrests/summons/citations in the county, and were linked to other types of crimes by local interviewees.

**Priority E. Runaways.** Runaways represent 4 percent of all juvenile arrests/ summons/ citations, and occur at slightly more than twice the rate in Sweetwater County in comparison to the state as a whole.

The team also considered demographic priorities, and came up with the following conclusions.

- Male offenders outnumber female offenders by more than two to one. While the plan should address both genders, a prioritization should place more emphasis on male offenders since they are far more common.

- There are specific age ranges where juveniles are far more likely to become involved in juvenile crime. Based on probation referrals, females are particularly vulnerable at the ages of 12 through 14. Males are particularly vulnerable at the age of 10 and in the 14 through 16 age range. Therefore, priority should be given to programs that target these age ranges.

#### **EXPERT OPINIONS – THE THOUGHTS OF JUVENILE CRIME PRACTITIONERS**

Interviews were conducted with approximately two dozen juvenile crime practitioners to assess their opinions about juvenile crime and the priority areas. A majority of those practitioners work in Sweetwater County, though some work in other geographic areas. The following statements summarize the most common and/or powerful opinions of this group with regard to priority offenses and other issues.

#### **LARCENIES**

1. Unsupervised free time is seen as a major risk factor.
2. Larcenies may be overrepresented in the data for policy and practical reasons (though this only proves that they are common crimes).
3. One interesting statement made by an interviewee pointed out that the legal consequences of committing a larceny are low, since those offenses are generally punishable only by fines.

#### **CURFEW VIOLATIONS**

1. There is considerable disagreement about the seriousness of curfew violations. Some interviewees view curfew violation as being related to other types of crime, and others see it as a relatively harmless transgression that should be the family's responsibility.
2. Unsupervised free time is seen as a major risk factor.
3. The conflict between the lack of a law in the county and the existing laws in the towns is an issue, and dilutes the effectiveness of the towns' laws.

#### **DRUG CRIMES**

1. Drug crimes generated the most discussion of any of the priority crimes. This was obviously a top concern among most, if not all, interviewees.
2. Drug abuse was seen as a common behavior, particularly meth use.
3. Drug abuse was seen as an easy, low-risk crime to commit. (Low-risk referring to the legal perspective rather than health or other issues.)
4. Drug use was seen as a cause or a risk factor for other crimes.
5. Youths were seen as vulnerable if adults in their family use drugs.
6. Meth use was a major concern among interviewees, both currently and in the future, and there are few resources in place to combat that growing issue.
7. Education and prevention efforts were deemed important.

#### **LIQUOR LAW VIOLATIONS**

1. There is a perception among practitioners that juvenile alcohol use is shrugged off by the community.
2. Keg parties are an issue, and keg registration is not being used as a means of enforcing liquor laws at the current time.

## RUNAWAYS

1. Runaways were seen as a social services issue more than a crime in many instances.
2. Runaways may be reported more often in Sweetwater County than in other communities, but this still remains a highly underreported offense.
3. There was a concern that runaways don't have a safe place to seek shelter.

## OPINIONS ON OTHER ISSUES

1. School was seen as a major issue. Keeping youth in school and productive was seen to solve several problems simultaneously: it provides a support network, a means of acquiring skills, and a means of reducing unsupervised idle time.
2. With one exception, all comments about the truancy program were very positive.
3. There was disagreement about the value of removing youths from their families. Some interviewees felt that removal should be a last resort, while others felt that it was a positive move if the family is a negative influence.
4. Several interviewees wanted to broaden the reach of the juvenile justice system, either through more preventive activities or through a longer "after care" program for offenders who have been released from treatment programs.
5. Family issues were acknowledged as a major factor in juvenile crime.
6. Additional Fact: Each year, approximately 900 new households move into Sweetwater County and 1,200 existing households (or newly forming households) move out. This "churn" of households has a bearing on the effectiveness of early long-term prevention.

## OPINIONS ON INFORMATION SHARING

1. Nearly every interviewee stated that he or she could better serve the interests of juvenile offenders if they had more information.
2. In many cases, the desired information exists elsewhere in the system, and is usually available upon request.
3. The desired information varied: school attendance and performance, previous juvenile justice interaction, information on family issues, and previous criminal information about parents were cited by different interviewees.

## BOTTLENECKS

1. Several interviewees stated that the juvenile prosecutor's office is understaffed, and despite strong effort often results in delays in the system.
2. Several interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with DFS services. Theories were varied, but included high turnover, low pay that promotes turnover and creates an inability to attract the strongest candidates, staff shortages, and management issues.

## INTERVIEWEES' "WISH LIST"

1. Out of 52 documented suggestions, 18 focused on pre-emptive preventive measures. Long-term prevention was very important to many interviewees.
2. One cogent point addressed the fact that there is no knowledge of the long-term outcomes of various treatment options in the county, and that a longitudinal study would be useful in assessing the efficacy of various treatment options.
3. Several interviewees addressed drug treatment as an area of need.

4. Several interviewees stressed programs that will prepare the offender for the future, in terms of education, skills, and critical thinking.
5. Information was a key need according to several interviewees, though the types of information varied.
6. No fewer than eight of the documented suggestions had a school component, either emphasizing the importance of schoolwork, identification of learning disabilities, or an enforcement presence via School Resource Officers. Schools were seen as a necessary partner in the process of juvenile crime reduction.

## PHASE FOUR. THE PLAN

The study team identified a number of potential plan elements based on the quantitative and qualitative information collected. Potential plan elements were developed in relation to the 12 purpose areas set forth in Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant criteria. Those 12 areas are:

- **Purpose Area #1:** Construction, Operations and Staff Training for Juvenile Confinement Facilities.
- **Purpose Area #2.** Developing/administering accountability-based sanctions programs for juvenile offenders.
- **Purpose area #3.** Hiring judges, probation officers, and defenders and funding pretrial services.
- **Purpose area #4.** Hiring prosecutors.
- **Purpose area #5.** Funding to help prosecutors address drug, gang, and violence problems more effectively.
- **Purpose area #6.** Providing technology, equipment, and training for prosecutors.
- **Purpose area #7.** Funding to improve effectiveness of juvenile courts and probation offices.
- **Purpose area #8.** Establishing gun courts.
- **Purpose area #9.** Establishing drug courts.
- **Purpose Area #10.** Establishing and maintaining interagency information-sharing systems.
- **Purpose Area #11.** Establishing and maintaining accountability-based programs for law enforcement referrals or to protect students and school personnel from drug, gang, or youth violence.
- **Purpose Area #12.** Implementing drug-testing programs (including interventions) for youth in the juvenile justice system.

During the course of the interviews, a number of potential plan elements were offered and/or inferred. The table below (two pages) lists those potential elements, along with their ability to be focused on priority offenses or priority demographic groups. A brief description of each section follows the table.

**POTENTIAL PLAN ELEMENTS**

<b>JAIBG Area Addressed</b>	<b>Potential Plan Element</b>	<b>Can the program be designed to target/benefit?</b>						
		<b>Priority Offenses</b>					<b>Target Groups</b>	
		<b>Larceny</b>	<b>Curfew Violations</b>	<b>Drug Use</b>	<b>Liquor Law Violations</b>	<b>Runaways</b>	<b>Males Age 10, 14-16</b>	<b>Females Age 12-14</b>
1	Expansion of Temporary Housing	X		X		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X
1	Capacity Development of Local Treatment/Confinement Facilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	X
1, 5	Inpatient Drug Treatment Facility			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
1	Centralized Juvenile Justice Facility	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2, 3, 7	Expansion of Capacity of Department of Juvenile Probation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2, 11	Expansion of Truancy Program	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	Development of Aftercare Programs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X		
2	Drug Follow-up Programs		X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
2	Life Skills/Critical Thinking Program	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Longitudinal Evaluation System	X	X	X	X	X		
3	Addition of New Judge Positions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3, 6, 10	Development of Information Clearinghouse	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	Hiring of Additional Prosecutor(s) and Associated Support Staff	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	Additional Law Enforcement Personnel to Address Drug Use			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

- The program element could be targeted to address this particular priority, at the discretion of the program designers.

X - The program will likely benefit this particular priority, though it will probably not be designed specifically for that purpose.

*Table is continued on the following page.*

JAIBG Area Addressed	Potential Plan Element	Can the program be designed to target/benefit?						
		Priority Offenses					Target Groups	
		Larceny	Curfew Violations	Drug Use	Liquor Law Violations	Runaways	Males Age 10, 14-16	Females Age 12-14
5	Increased Keg Registrations and Enforcement of Liquor Laws				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X
5	Curfew Impact Analysis	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	X		
5	Education Programs in Schools	X	X	X	X	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Enhancement of Capacity of Department of Family Services	X	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X
9	Development of Drug Court			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
11	Expand Programs to Identify and Assist High-Risk Students	X	X	X	X	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Develop/Expand Complementary Assistance to the Truancy Program	X	X	X	X	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Expand After-School and Evening Activities	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

- The program element could be targeted to address this particular priority, at the discretion of the program designers.  
X - The program will likely benefit this particular priority, though it will probably not be designed specifically for that purpose.

Temporary Housing: There is currently a very limited capacity in dual correctional/social services facilities. While raw capacity is generally sufficient for demand at the current time, there is a lack of ability to segregate offenders, and to segregate offenders from children being housed for social services reasons.

Capacity development of local treatment/confinement facilities: The county relies heavily on out-of-county treatment facilities for on-site care. This certainly creates added cost to the program, but opinions are divided about whether removing juveniles from their family and environment has positive or negative effects. In terms of confinement facilities, the current jail has a very limited capacity (< 7 juveniles), but a new facility is under construction.

Inpatient drug treatment facility: Drug crime is rising, and the need for a treatment facility was cited during interviews. Development of a local inpatient drug treatment center would address this rising problem while also decreasing transportation costs to out-of-county treatment centers.

Centralized juvenile justice facility: This was mentioned as a possibility to enhance efficiency and information sharing; however, it may be possible to enhance efficiency at lower cost via an information-sharing system.

Expansion of capacity of Department of Juvenile Probation: The services provided by this department were very well regarded by many interviewees, and is facing significant funding termination during the next year.

Expansion of Truancy Program: The services provided in this program were well-regarded by most interviewees, and may be a factor in the recent decline in juvenile arrests/summons/citations.

Development of Aftercare Programs: Many interviewees cited concerns that juveniles are often removed from the system upon completion of a term at the Boys' School or Girls' School or other treatment facility or program.

Drug Follow-up Programs: This may be part of a Juvenile Probation expansion or part of a DFS function, and may be necessary due to trends in drug crime.

Life Skills/Critical Thinking Program: This type of program could be targeted toward any of the priority offense areas, but might be particularly useful for larcenies and drug/alcohol offenses.

Evaluation Systems: Set up a long-term longitudinal analysis to determine the efficacy of various treatments and programs.

Addition of new judge positions: While few interviewees cited a shortage of judges as a bottleneck in the system, it may emerge as one if new prosecutor positions are added.

Development of an information clearinghouse: Pre-trial service systems are in place, but gaps exist in sharing information. Development of a centralized information clearinghouse linking all elements of the juvenile justice system – including district, circuit, and municipal courts - would enhance the quality of the system.

Additional prosecutor(s): This was cited as a strong need in the county. Staff shortages in this area were deemed a bottleneck in the system by several interviewees. This might include not only prosecutors themselves, but also support staff in that office.

Addressing drug enforcement: An additional law enforcement officer to solely address drug supply issues in the county could be of value in addressing that particular issue.

Controlling alcohol supplies: Active registration of kegs and enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors is a straightforward way of controlling large-scale alcohol abuse by teens, while also lessening the likelihood of keg parties that result in curfew violations and the potential for other crimes.

Curfew impact analysis: Given the strong disagreements about the impacts, enforcement, and even existence of curfews, an analysis of curfew impacts on juvenile crime is a recommended first step in addressing this issue.

Education programs in schools and community: Educating youth about the risks of drug and alcohol abuse, along with other criminal issues, is important, beginning at an early age. Education would include parents, in order to ensure their cooperation in prevention activities. For efficiency, drug education could be combined with education about other issues such as battery and assault.

Enhancement of capacity of Department of Family Services: While the Department of Family Services is not specifically a probation department, they can provide strong assistance to the juvenile

justice system. However, several interviewees cited dissatisfaction with the services currently provided by DFS with regard to juvenile support. (This is independent of social services cases and functions, which were not addressed in this study.) Theories included high turnover of staff, low pay, management issues, and unreasonably high caseloads. Identification and solution of any issues that might be obstructing the full value of the organization's services can be identified and rectified.

Drug court: A drug court appears to be a good fit with Sweetwater County's growing drug arrests/summons/citations, though a feasibility study may be necessary to determine if the volume of cases is sufficient to justify a drug court at this time.

Expand programs to identify and assist high-risk students, particularly in early grades: These programs can create the social norming necessary to counter negative influences that the student may experience. They can also identify learning disabilities, mental health issues, or other problems that may eventually lead to frustration with school, truancy, and juvenile crime.

Develop/Expand complementary assistance to the Truancy Program: Provide mentors, tutors, mental health counseling, or other services to assist students in the Truancy Program to ensure that any extrinsic factors are diagnosed and treated.

Expand after-school activities, including evening activities: A common refrain in considering juvenile crime in Sweetwater County was the lack of productive, supervised activities for youth.

#### **RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES**

The study team encourages the juvenile justice community to plan and implement a summit to discuss the Juvenile Crime Reduction Plan and critique priorities. Based on our research, we suggest the following elements as top priorities. These are presented in no particular order.

##### **Priorities for Immediate Impact:**

- Hire an additional prosecuting attorney and (possibly) supporting staff.
- Develop system-wide information clearinghouse.
- Expand capacity of Department of Juvenile Probation.
- Expand capacity of truancy program.

The first priority is a result of numerous interviewees stating that a shortage of prosecuting attorneys represents a barrier to swift movement through the juvenile justice system.

The second priority reflects the statements of numerous interviewees that fragmented information systems result in agencies working without useful information that may already exist elsewhere in the system.

The third and fourth priorities are predicated on evaluation findings that show a positive impact of these programs, and are substantially based, at this point, on the positive subjective opinions of interviewees.

### **Priorities for Long-Term Impact**

- Inpatient drug treatment facility.
- Develop longitudinal evaluation system.
- Expand programs to identify and assist high-risk students.
- Expand after-school and evening activities

The first priority is based on the high concern that interviewees had regarding the use of meth and other drugs, and the statistical increase in the number of drug arrests/summons/citations. A drug treatment facility will allow for local treatment of offenders, and from a practical perspective may be cost-effective relative to the high cost of transporting offenders to distant urban areas.

The second priority is based on identifying the long-term effectiveness of various interventions and preventive measures on Sweetwater County. This would not only examine program effectiveness, but would also take into account practicalities such as the churn of households into and out of the county. This can be important when determining the impact of early prevention programs versus treatments for offenders.

The third priority is based on the emphasis on prevention that many interviewees cited, and the belief that school performance is strongly indicative of future juvenile crime tendencies. To the extent that a longitudinal evaluation system shows that early prevention is productive for the county, these programs will act upon that potential.

The fourth priority is based on research that shows unsupervised idle time to be a major predictor of juvenile crime, in concert with local observations that parental shift work and a lack of supervised activities result in an overabundance of unsupervised idle time for youth. New activities targeted at the priority age ranges may provide supervised productive activities for those most at risk.

These recommended short-term and long-term priorities reflect the study team's observations and recommendations. Several important factors and programs are not included in these top priorities for reasons of practicality. Of these, perhaps the most important is the recognition that family and community norms play a very important role in the lives of youth, and negative influences in those areas can be overwhelming. The study recognizes those forces, but also recognizes the difficulty in changing them on an individual basis. While they may be the county's most important long-term goal, they fall beyond the scope of this plan to address.

A short, medium, and long-term implementation outline for each program element is provided in the full report, with an emphasis on the order in which plans might be undertaken to avoid negative "downstream" effects.