Prevention, Not Prosecution:
The road to reducing juvenile and young-offender crime through the Drug Forfeiture Community Reinvestment and Young Adult Diversion Programs

Office of Worcester County District Attorney Joseph D. Early, Jr.

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July, 2014

I. Introduction

Worcester County District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr. has long maintained that he “would rather prevent a crime than have to prosecute a crime.” To that end, it is the dual mission of the District Attorney’s Office to secure justice for victims and the community by prosecuting offenders and to maximize the efficiency of the judicial system, circumvent the negative consequences of illegal activity, and judiciously manage taxpayer dollars by preventing crime in the first place. Community outreach programs that provide services and opportunities to Worcester County’s youth and young offenders are some of the most powerful tools in the crime prevention arsenal, and a primary focus for District Attorney Early.

The Drug Forfeiture Community Reinvestment Program (Community Reinvestment Program), which provides funding for valuable youth-centered organizations, and the Young Adult Diversion Program (Diversion Program), which offers young, first-time offenders an opportunity to wipe their record clean and to build connections with their community through service, are two such projects. These programs are designed 1) to head off criminal activity in Worcester County by deterring and diverting potential offenders at a young age; 2) to reduce the number of juvenile and young adult prosecutions, maximizing the efficiency of the judicial system and freeing up court dockets for serious crimes; 3) to save taxpayer dollars that would
otherwise be spent prosecuting and incarcerating adolescents and young adults; and 4) to eventually reduce the number of people in our jails.

Derived from data demonstrating the meaningful influence similar programs have had on crime rates and the lives of young people nationwide, the Diversion and Community Reinvestment programs reflect District Attorney Early’s commitment both to crime prevention and to students and young adults in Worcester County. “We do everything at the District Court and Superior Court levels that we need to do, but prevention is really how you make a difference,” Early said.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section will address the policies and laws that govern the Community Reinvestment Program’s use of seized funds and the process by which local organizations apply for grants through the program. It will discuss the critical impact that after-school programs and activities, like those funded by the Community Reinvestment Program, can have on the lives of at-risk youth in discouraging risky and illegal behavior. Finally, it will examine the positive outcomes of this program for Worcester County and its youth. The second section will provide an explanation of the Diversion Program, looking at the eligibility and completion requirements for participants. It will then address the origins of the well-established pretrial diversion model, the research, which is rooted in the concept of alternative justice, and the unmitigated success and growth of the Diversion Program in Worcester County.

II. Drug Forfeiture Community Reinvestment Program

A. Through a carefully administered grant application process, the Drug Forfeiture Community Reinvestment Program promotes community youth-based programs that help prevent crime.

District Attorney Early’s Drug Forfeiture Community Reinvestment Program allocates
the proceeds of drug crime seizures to youth-focused community programs in Worcester County through a careful grant application process. These grants help to expand opportunities for local students to participate in positive constructive activity during the hours of the day when children are most likely to engage in criminal activity.

Asset forfeiture is the process by which property is seized and forfeited to the state due to its connection to the narcotics trade. The forfeiture process and seized funds are governed by G.L. c. 94C § 47. For property to be seized and forfeited, there must be a nexus between the property and narcotics activity. The government must establish probable cause to believe that the seized asset was used or intended for the use in the procurement, manufacturing, compounding, processing, delivery and/or distribution of controlled substances or is the proceeds of the sale of controlled substances, all in violation of G.L. c. 94C. Once the asset is seized, the Commonwealth files a civil forfeiture complaint naming the property as the defendant. The person from whom the property was seized may intervene in the suit as an interested party. Once the Commonwealth has met its statutory burden of showing probable cause to institute a forfeiture action, the person from whom the property was seized must prove “that the property is not forfeitable.”1 If the court allows forfeiture of the assets and the asset is money, the money is divided equally between the District Attorney’s Office and the police department responsible for the seizure. The forfeited money may then be used “to provide additional technical equipment of expertise, to provide matching funds to obtain federal grants, or such other law enforcement purposes as the District Attorney . . . deems appropriate. The District Attorney . . . may expend up to 10 percent of the monies and proceeds for drug rehabilitation, drug education and other anti-drug or neighborhood crime watch programs, which further law enforcement purposes.”2
Organizations that wish to obtain funding for their programs through the Community Reinvestment Program must submit a “request for funding” application. In the application, the company specifies how the program pertains to a law enforcement purpose, such as drug education. The connection to a law enforcement purpose may include youth programs that are designed to reduce participants’ likelihood of criminal behavior by engaging at-risk youth in activities that pique their interests while providing responsible adult mentors and role models who the youth can respect and emulate; in short, crime prevention. A committee of three members of the District Attorney’s staff evaluates the appropriateness of the application, specifically considering whether or not the programs benefit at-risk youth, and make their recommendations to the District Attorney, who gives final approval. Once a grant is awarded, the grantee is required to submit an expense report showing how the granted funds were spent. To ensure proper oversight, records of all expenditures are maintained and are subject to audit by the Officer of the State Comptroller at a minimum of every three years. Through the administration of this program, funds that once facilitated the flow of narcotics and crime within Worcester County, become the tools of education and crime prevention.

B. **After-school programs play a critical role in reducing juvenile crime through constructive activity and positive role models.**

The Worcester County District Attorney’s Community Reinvestment Program is modeled after the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Asset Forfeiture Program, which is a “nationwide law enforcement initiative designed to remove the tools of crime from criminal organizations, deprive wrongdoers of the proceeds of their crimes . . . and deter crime.” Like the DOJ, District Attorney Early has specified guidelines for the permissible use of forfeited funds to ensure these assets are funneled back into Worcester County through community-based programs.³ One such program is the Boys’ and Girls’ Club summer basketball camp in Webster and Dudley, funded
by the U.S. Department of Education through a Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety grant in partnership with the District Attorney’s Office in 2011.

The DOJ identified several risk factors, which if present during an individual’s early adolescence, increase the likelihood of later involvement in the criminal justice system. These factors include low socio-economic status, poor performance in school, and a lack of positive influences. The programs approved for grants through the Community Reinvestment Program provide what the DOJ refers to as a buffer, which may mitigate, or reverse these risks. These programs offer opportunities to young people from low income families to participate in activities that boost self-esteem and keep them active, both in school and in the critical hours after they leave the classroom. Students who participate in sports programs or other extracurricular activities supported by the Community Reinvestment Program are more likely to stay in school until graduation, which has a direct impact on their future earning potential as well as decreased involvement in criminal activity. Additionally, these programs help to remove children from negative influences and provide them with positive role models who may show them ways to achieve their goals. The Community Reinvestment Program also serves the public at large, by providing many youth throughout the community with opportunities to participate in positive activities and prevention programs, leading to healthier and safer communities.

After-school programs are an important part of any composite strategy to prevent juvenile crime. In the words of former Minnesota Congressman Bruce Vento, “urban recreation and sports programs are a proven, common sense, and cost-effective means of preventing crime and delinquency.” Recently, analysis has indicated that investment in appropriate juvenile crime prevention strategies, such as after-school programs, can return seven to ten dollars in savings for every dollar invested, primarily in reduced spending on prosecutions and incarceration. These
incredible returns are possible because most adult criminals begin their careers as juveniles. Through early intervention, it is possible to prevent at-risk youth from becoming adult criminals and thus reduce the overall cost of their criminality on both society and their potential victims.

A substantial body of research conducted over the last two decades has shown that after-school programs in both community and institutional settings can reduce crime by up to 30 percent. Such programs played a significant part in reducing the crime rate in cities such as Boston, with those who participate in the programs showing higher self-esteem, improved academic achievement, and a lower propensity to commit crimes.

These after-school programs often struggle for funding and there are few measures in place to fund these important after-school prevention programs. Because of funding shortages and a lack of public awareness of the efficacy of these programs, it is estimated that only 5 percent of the youth who could benefit from such programs have access to them. The same study suggested that “[e]very year of delay in implementing . . . [after school programs] consigns another cohort of juvenile offenders to a 50 percent higher than necessary recidivism rate.”

Luckily, when guided through membership and mentorship provided by high quality after-school programs, “most antisocial youth do not become antisocial adults.” In situations where funding may be lacking, it is programs such as the Community Reinvestment Program that step in to ensure these vital programs are well supported.

After-school programs are so effective in preventing crime because they work on a multifactorial level, simultaneously incapacitating at-risk youth during the hours they are most likely to commit offenses and guiding them toward a better path by teaching them self-esteem, discipline, teamwork, and providing strong mentors and role models. “Youth crime happens when it can happen,” opined Howard Snyder, former head of the National Center on Juvenile
Justice. In other words, juveniles commit crimes opportunistically, when they are unsupervised, and usually due to a sudden impulse or opportunity, not out of a criminal master plan. Thus, by keeping youth occupied during the hours they would otherwise be presented with opportunities to skirt the law, one can reduce crime simply by never giving them the chance to commit it.

This theory, known as incapacitation, is the justification behind the popularly supported juvenile curfew initiatives. Unlike curfews, however, after-school programs focus narrowly on the specific time frame during which juveniles commit the most crimes. According to a study by the DOJ, four times as many juvenile crimes are committed during the after-school period of 3 to 6 p.m., compared to the time(s) when curfews are in place. On school days, juvenile violence peaks at 3 p.m. and then declines throughout the day. Studies by police departments in major cities in California have found a similar 2 to 6 p.m. window, and numerous initiatives including one by former Boston Mayor Tom Menino have recognized and addressed this through direct funding of after-school programs. This time period is critical because it encompasses the window between when most schools let out and when most parents get home. Children who are not enrolled in after-school programs, day-care, or another supervised care situation, who practice what is often referred to as “self-care” or “latchkey care,” are left to their own devices, which may include exposure to criminal opportunities. Unfortunately, much of the rhetoric around latchkey children has been harshly negative; use of the term “latchkey” is often a code word, “that means they are doing damage, instead of noting how they are being damaged” by their lack of supervision and structure. “First and foremost, after-school programs keep children of all ages safe and out of trouble,” noted one researcher. A child on the street with
peers may be offered drugs or succumb to sudden temptation to steal a car, whereas the same child enrolled in an after-school hockey league would never be presented with the chance to do either. Providing adequate after-school programming is therefore important from the earliest ages up through the teenage years to ensure youth grow up without the sort of behavioral problems and academic deficiencies that can lead to delinquency and crime.

There is strong evidence that this kind of early intervention is essential to molding the productive citizens of tomorrow, and that in its absence, behavioral problems breed delinquency, which can later lead to career criminality.\textsuperscript{26} Traits such as aggression show a strong correlation to later drug use and delinquency, continuing on to criminality in adulthood.\textsuperscript{27, 28} Certain factors were found to mediate this pattern and “protect” children from developing into nascent criminals despite difficult backgrounds.\textsuperscript{29} These factors include academic achievement, religious commitment, strong family bonds, and a strong attachment to and emulation of a wholesome role model.\textsuperscript{30} The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has found that academic achievement correlates with reduced delinquency.\textsuperscript{31} After-school programs have been shown to increase academic achievement, community ties, and can provide strong role models that may be lacking in other aspects of a child’s life, and are thus, as would be expected, effective in mitigating youth risk factors such as aggression and adolescent drug use.\textsuperscript{32, 33, 34}

A 2005 longitudinal study evaluating the effects of after-school programs found significant increase in academic performance and motivational attributes after a single year enrolled in after-school programs.\textsuperscript{35} Likewise a 2006 meta-analysis of numerous different studies and programs found an increase in student achievements in reading and math as a result of their involvement in after-school activities.\textsuperscript{36} This association was stronger when the activity
was tailored to that specific skill, such as reading tutors, but persisted also for more general activities, such as sports.\textsuperscript{37}

In addition to the positive effects of after-school programs on academic achievement, research shows that exposure to positive role models is a critical factor in keeping youth out of trouble and on the path to success. One program that is instructive as to the possibilities of after-school programs and in particular the powerful effects a strong mentor can have on a juvenile is the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America Program.\textsuperscript{38} A random sampling of 16 year olds, half of whom were given a mentor and the other half not, were compared after eighteen months of involvement. Having a strong mentor in a young person’s life even for that short amount of time was found to decrease first time drug use by 46 percent, cut school absenteeism by 52 percent, and reduce violent behavior by 33 percent.\textsuperscript{39} Mentored youth were also more likely to perform better in school, improve their relationships with friends and family, less likely to assault others, and less likely to begin using alcohol. Moreover, these effects were consistent and sustained for both boys and girls and across races.\textsuperscript{40} Although not all programs can replicate the intensity of the mentorship of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs, similar mentorship-focused programs, such as the ones the District Attorney supports, which provide mentorship for at-risk youth, can nevertheless achieve some of the effects that other mentorship programs have demonstrated.\textsuperscript{41} Worcester East Middle School is an example of a mentoring program that District Attorney Early’s Office has had a three to five year association with. Each summer, approximately fifty boys and girls are sent to Holy Cross for summer camp. What once seemed like a million miles away has now become a reality for these youths, opening them up to a different world. The participants of this summer camp are able to explore the college campus, bond with the players, engage in educational activities and realize future possibilities.
The important features of an after-school program are not necessarily the activity itself, but the foundations of each program. Four “common denominators” of after-school programs that are effective in preventing juvenile delinquency and crime are: a well-developed organizational structure, regular meetings, an emphasis on increasingly complex skill-building as an activity goal, and leadership by one or more competent adults. Thus, well-organized and supported team sports, like those the Community Reinvestment Program helps to fund, which satisfy all four factors, can be a particularly effective tool in curbing juvenile crime and substance abuse. Philadelphia reports that extending the hours of its basketball courts reduced police calls reporting juvenile delinquent activity by as much as 55 percent. Another case study indicated that delinquent adolescent boys exposed to a highly regimented sports-based program showed significant improvements on delinquency and personality measures; whereas those who played football and basketball, without coaching or teaching, showed no improvement, stressing the importance of implementing these programs in a well-funded, well supported way with strong role models. A 2006 analysis of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey, likewise, found significant positive effects regarding involvement in organized sports and substance abuse. That study found that involvement in after-school sports significantly reduced both cigarette and marijuana use across gender and racial groups, and reduced alcohol use among black females, even after controlling for all other risk factors for drug use. By supporting these programs with better funding, many of the juvenile crimes and substance abuse issues we are struggling with as a society and as a community can be prevented before they even begin, especially when our youth are exposed to positive role models and encouraged to achieve academically in after-school activities.

C. Investing locally in youth-focused community programs is helping to prevent juvenile crime in Worcester County, saving taxpayer dollars and promoting a safer community.
In the United States, more than 23 million criminal offenses were committed in 2007, resulting in approximately $15 billion in economic losses to the victims and $179 billion in government expenditures on police protection, judicial and legal activities, and corrections. Programs that directly or indirectly prevent crime can therefore generate substantial economic benefits by reducing crime-related costs incurred by victims, communities, and the criminal justice system.48

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has stated that, “if the state could reduce its recidivism rate by just 5 percent, it would reap a savings of $150 million.”49 For the 2013 Fiscal Year, the average cost per year to house an inmate in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections (DOC) was $47,102.03, with the average time served at 3.7 years for males and 2.7 years for females.50 An estimated $1.2 billion is spent annually on incarceration in Massachusetts, approximately 6 to 7 percent more than the total amount spent on education per year.51

In an effort to prevent crime, reducing the necessary expenditures on prosecution and incarceration, District Attorney Early has contributed more than $735,500 to community youth-centered organizations since his election to office in 2007 through the Community Reinvestment Program. Funds seized during the investigation of drug crimes have been reintroduced into the community through a number of groups and programs, including the Boys and Girls Clubs, Tenacity, YOU Inc., Southbridge Cops-N-Kids, the Juvenile Court Art Program, and various school athletic teams throughout Worcester County.

District Attorney Early’s philosophy of attacking crime at its infancy through positive prevention efforts has had a marked impact on countless youth in Worcester County. Go Local Worcester reported that juvenile detentions in Worcester County have decreased 55 percent since 2007 and arraignments have decreased 44 percent.52 Thus, by repurposing the monies that once
facilitated criminal drug activity to provide at-risk youth with these positive opportunities, the Community Reinvestment Program helps to transform the instrument of drug crime into a tool of deterrence and positive change for Worcester County communities.

III. The Young Adult Diversion Program

A. The Young Adult Diversion Program of Worcester offers first-time, nonviolent offenders who complete the program a clean slate, preserving critical future employment and educational opportunities and discouraging recidivism.

District Attorney Early maintains a strong commitment to the prevention of crime and strongly believes that we “cannot prosecute or arrest our way out of the problem” — specifically the crime rate among Worcester County’s youth. As a part of his prevention efforts, District Attorney Early has had much success with his Young Adult Diversion Program, which allows first-time offenders between the ages of 17 and 22 who are charged with certain nonviolent misdemeanor crimes, to avoid a mark on their criminal record by performing eight hours of community service, paying $100 in court costs, and successfully completing an online education program. Individuals who commit certain crimes, such as minor in possession of alcohol, minor transporting an alcoholic beverage, possession of an open container, disturbing the peace, disorderly conduct, shoplifting (first offense), and keeping a noisy or disorderly house, are offered the opportunity to postpone their arraignment for ninety days to participate in the program. If the young adult reoffends or fails to complete the requirements of the program within that timeframe, the offer is withdrawn, and he or she will be prosecuted for the offense with which he or she was initially charged. However, if the individual completes the community service, pays the court costs, and completes the educational online course, his or her record is wiped clean of the charge(s), affording a rare opportunity for a fresh start.

By diverting young offenders before they are arraigned in the Worcester County court
system, the Diversion Program offers a second chance to young adults whose ability to apply to college, seek employment, or even remain in their respective athletic programs might otherwise be negatively impacted by a criminal record. District Attorney Early described the program to Worcester Magazine as “a break, but a fair break” in 2012. “It’s the type of thing that can come back and hurt you,” said Early, who recognizes that these young, first-time offenders should be held responsible for their actions, but offered an opportunity to avoid compromising their futures.

Through the community service aspect of the Diversion Program, these young adults have contributed to the improvement of dozens of public school fields and parks in Worcester County, giving local children a safe place to play. They have also engaged with other facets of the community by volunteering with local soup kitchens and helping clean a local church gymnasium utilized for a nonprofit basketball league involving more than 750 students, many of who are at risk. By participating in such projects, these young adults participate in the restorative justice process, develop positive and meaningful relationships with role models and build a connection with their community that discourages future criminal behavior. The Diversion Program offers young, nonviolent offenders a healthy and positive alternative to traditional means of punishment in the criminal system and also allows them to engage with their community and build upon their understanding of community and the law.

The Diversion Program benefits the Worcester County community as well. The projects the Diversion Program participants complete, such as restoring high school fields to conditions that are safe and playable, provide more places where local children can play in a safe environment supervised by responsible adults. A myriad of after-school activities are directly supported by the efforts of the Diversion Program’s participants, reinforcing District Attorney Early’s efforts to prevent crime through investment in positive youth programs.
Funding for the Diversion Program’s community service projects does not come out of public coffers and, in fact, the program saves the Worcester County taxpayers money. Prosecuting and incarcerating young, first-time offender costs taxpayers millions of dollars every year and burdens the criminal system with minor offense cases, diverting prosecutorial and judicial resources away from more serious crimes. The Diversion Program reduces the limited budgetary resources expended on prosecution of young, non-dangerous, first-time offenders and, simultaneously, repurposes money seized from drug transactions to pay for the supplies and equipment Diversion Program participants use to complete community service projects. In this sense, the Diversion Program functions as a sister program to the Community Reinvestment Program.

Some of the community service projects completed by individuals involved in the Diversion Program include: working on softball and baseball fields; serving meals in churches and shelters; improving play areas; raking, grading, and seeding fields at Elm Park Community School; working on the football field at South High School; coordinating with the Worcester Tree Initiative for planting trees and shrubs; installing a classroom in the woods at Vernon Hill School; and improving baseball fields in Fitchburg, Gardner, and Clinton.

B. The Young Adult Diversion Program follows a well-established model of alternative justice for young offenders.

The idea of diversion for young adults is not a novel or untested one. The rehabilitative alternative to punishment is utilized, particularly for young and juvenile offenders nationwide, because it allows the focus to remain on the individual rather than the particular offense and also allows for a consideration of a number of factors, including the level of offense, the maturity of the offender, and the totality of the circumstances.
During the 1960s, pretrial diversion programs rose in popularity as prosecutors found that young offenders could be rehabilitated as well in community-based programs as in institutions. Moreover, institutionalization of young offenders is linked to a number of negative outcomes, including one of the most destructive for young adults: labeling. As criminal justice professionals began to recognize the harm the traditional prosecution tract wrought on young adults, diversion became a major correctional movement. In 1967 the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice formally supported diversion programs as a valuable form of alternative justice, particularly for first time and petty offenders. The commission argued for non-judicial community processes for young offenders to be used; a new alternative to formal proceedings.

In response to this commission, Congress passed the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in 1974. The Act’s stated objective was “to divert juveniles from the traditional juvenile justice system and to provide critically needed alternatives to institutionalization.” Across the country, local jurisdictions began to introduce individualized versions of the diversion model, and by the mid-1970s hundreds of diversion programs were operating nationwide.

Research shows that pretrial diversionary programs are both an effective crime prevention tool, which can reduce recidivism among participants, and a low cost alternative to traditional prosecution. Diversion programs allow the young offender to maintain ties with their family and their community. This offsets the negative impact of a formal delinquent label, which adversely affects self-image and can contribute to future criminal behavior.

In reducing recidivism, diversionary programs benefit not only their participants, but also society at large. These programs help remove many juveniles from the “revolving door” syndrome. Young offenders who are not labeled as criminals, given a second chance, and
encouraged to give back to their communities through service, are less likely to reoffend. Community service provides an opportunity for the juvenile offender to pay back the community for his or her offenses through personal time and effort, and gives the young offender a firsthand look at the impact his or her offenses had on the community. By recasting young offenders’ image of themselves as members of the community, diversion programs reduce the likelihood that they will commit future crimes within that community. Rather than seeking punishment through a more traditional model, this restorative justice model tries to repair the harm done to the community and shift the focus from punishment to individual accountability and responsibility for the offense.

Research shows that diversion programs in community settings help to cut crime rates by up to 30 percent by allowing young offenders to develop psychologically. By providing young offenders with a supportive social environment, positive role models, a second chance, and opportunities to build a sense of inclusion and pride in their community, it is District Attorney Early’s hope that they will be motivated to stay on track and less likely to commit criminal offenses in the future.

The Young Adult Diversion Program has been extremely successful in Worcester County. The vast majority of young offenders offered the opportunity to participate in the program have chosen to complete the requirements within the allotted time frame and have done so successfully. To date, more than 1,500 young people have participated in the Young Adult Diversion Program, and more than 88 percent of participants successfully completed the program and did not reoffend within the monitored timeframe. Given the great success of the pilot Diversion Program in Worcester District Court, District Attorney Early has expanded the program to all ten district courts in Worcester County.
IV. Conclusion

Through investment in Worcester County’s youth, and a well-established alternative approach to the adjudication of young offenders, the Drug Forfeiture Community Reinvestment and the Young Adult Diversion programs help to achieve District Attorney Early’s crime prevention goals. These programs transform criminal activity and its proceeds into agents of positive change in local communities through programs and methods that are proven to work, saving taxpayer dollars, increasing the efficiency of the criminal justice system, and fostering the future success of Worcester County’s youth and young adults.

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5 I d.
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9 I d.
12 Greenwood, supra note 6, at 203.
13 I d. at 205.
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22 Lewis, supra note 15, at 484.
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27 Id.
29 Id.
30 Id.
31 Katner, supra note 24, at 56.
32 Meredith Cosden et al., The Effects of Homework Programs and After-School Activities on School Success, 43 THEORY INTO PRAC. 220, 220 (2004).
34 Vandell, supra note 22, at 64-80.
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39 Quinn 111-12. [*]
40 Id.
41 Katner, supra note 24, at 60.
42 Mahoney, supra note 14, at 504.
44 The Trust for Public Land, supra note 5, at 66.
45 Id. 26.
46 Id. 25-33.
47 Id. 30.
50 Id.
54 Id.
55 Id.
56 Id.
58 Id.