

Presidential Documents

Proclamation 6935 of October 10, 1996

National Day of Concern About Young People and Gun Violence, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Few losses are more difficult to face than the death of a young person. Such deaths are even more appalling when they result from violence by another youth. It is a tragedy of modern American life that thousands of our young people each year suffer deadly violence initiated by their peers. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data show that in the decade between 1984 and 1993 the number of homicide arrests of juveniles skyrocketed by 168 percent. Even more disturbing, the fastest increase in violent crime arrests of juveniles occurred among children 10 to 12 years old. Demographic experts predicted that, if those trends continued, juvenile violent crime arrests would double by the year 2010.

Now, new FBI data show reason for cautious optimism. For the first time in 7 years, the juvenile crime arrest rate decreased—by 2.9 percent in 1995. In addition, juvenile arrests for murder declined by 15.2 percent in 1995—the largest 1-year decrease in more than 10 years. Since 1993, the arrest rate for murder among juveniles has decreased by 22.8 percent.

Although this trend is encouraging, far too many of our young people still are committing violent acts. Fueling this problem is the prevalence of, and easy access to, illegal firearms on our Nation's streets. Between 1985 and 1992, the number of juvenile homicides not involving guns increased by 20 percent, while the number involving guns jumped by 300 percent. Because guns are easily available, routine fights among young people often turn into gun battles. Then, as the tragic cycle of violence repeats itself, more and more young people, fearing for their safety, arm themselves. The resulting escalation of gun violence and death threatens the Nation's most precious resource for the future—our young people.

We have expanded an experimental tracing program that targets those who provide or sell guns to young people. But we need to do more to keep guns out of the hands of our kids. We need to further improve and vigorously enforce our gun laws. And we need to reduce the sale and use of illegal drugs, which also fuel gun violence.

We also need to begin teaching children as early as possible how to choose not to be violent. All of us can take an active role in making sure that conflict resolution and other anti-violence programs are in place in our local schools, community centers, and places of worship. Community leaders, businesses, and other local institutions must create “safe havens” where children can go after school. Such actions can be a tangible sign of care and concern on the part of the community. Most importantly, parents need to teach their children right from wrong, so that they can learn the core values of our society and live according to them. In this undertaking, parents must be sensitive, patient, diligent, and fair, in order to provide a proper nonviolent model.

While parents, teachers, clergy, and the community at large can provide encouragement, the ultimate responsibility for reducing youth violence lies with our young people themselves. They must commit to resolve disputes

without violence and to avoid violent situations and friends. They must become positive role models for their peers, siblings, and younger children. Many young people have already made this commitment and are working in their schools and neighborhoods to end violence. For this, we salute them and urge them to continue to work for peaceful solutions. We call upon all young people to make this same commitment.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim October 10, 1996, as a National Day of Concern About Young People and Gun Violence. On this day I call upon young people in classrooms and playgrounds across the United States to make a solemn decision about their future. I call upon them voluntarily to sign a pledge promising that they will never take a gun to school, that they will never use a gun to settle a dispute, and that they will use their influence to prevent friends from using guns to settle disputes. Finally, I call upon all Americans to commit themselves anew to helping our Nation's young people avoid violence and grow up to be happy, healthy, and productive adults.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".

[FR Doc. 96-26530

Filed 10-11-96; 8:45 am]

Billing code 3195-01-P