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Gangland Colonoscopy

Civil rights attorney Connie Rice gets funding for a major new study to determine whether any gang abatement programs really work

~ By PERRY CROWE ~



what exactly constitutes a gang? Our Gang, circa 1930s

Last month, Los Angeles civil rights attorney Connie Rice sat before the City Council and vowed to give the city's gang problem a "colonoscopy." The council liked the sound of that and approved a hefty \$500,000 price tag for Rice's Advancement Project to develop a Citywide Gang Activity Reduction Strategy. The project, with an initial report due in September, has its work cut out for it, though, as the very definition of a gang is subject to interpretation.

Some groups commonly called "gangs" are relatively peaceful and loosely affiliated neighborhood groups. Other gangs are elaborately structured with eyes on criminal enterprise. The L.A. Police Department puts the citywide gang population at 39,000, while others lower the number to 19,000 and still others push the number to nearly 80,000. Even compiling a list of the city's current gang-abatement programs is hard to figure. Depending on the definition, there could be as many as 100 programs and as few as 20. And that's not even getting into the more complicated issue



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Civil rights attorney Connie

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of whether or not any of those programs are actually working.

"There's no one effective way to evaluate these programs," says Rice. "Is it simply counting the number of meetings [a program holds], or is it whether the gang ends its existence? Are you evaluating them like you evaluate an Alcoholics Anonymous program, or are you evaluating them the way you evaluate a soup kitchen delivering meals?"

To answer these questions, Rice has assembled a team of 14 experts from the realms of academia, philanthropy, law enforcement, and social services, as well as unpaid consultants Rice terms "street Ph.D.s" – current and former gang members. The study breaks the gang problem into nine clusters including Individual Development Factors, Safe and Healthy Families, Demographics, Governmental Structures, and Funding Analysis.

As the study progresses, the Advancement Project will provide a "menu from which [the city can] choose strategies and solutions" to combat the gang problem.

While the scope of the study is staggering, a similar study has already been conducted at the state level. In 2000, state assemblymen Tony Cardenas and Adam Schiff introduced what would become the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA), which set aside funds for juvenile programs that had "been proven effective in curbing crime among at-risk and young offenders." Now a city councilman and chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Gang Violence and Youth Development, Cardenas is trying to bring that same focus on accountability to the city level.

The JJCPA utilized "quasi-experimental" tests to evaluate programs' effectiveness, which consisted of taking a group from a program under evaluation, constructing a comparison group (using matching or similar techniques to the program), and then comparing the two. But such evaluations are open to the criticism that differences in performance are due to differences between the groups, not due to the program itself.

Despite its potential flaws, experimental testing is still the only viable way to truly gauge a program's effectiveness, suggests Dr. Malcolm Klein, professor emeritus of Sociology at the University of Southern California. Klein, a world-renowned expert who has studied gangs for 40 years and has written 17 books on the subject, recently undertook an analysis of 60 gang prevention, intervention, and suppression programs nationwide.

"Almost none of the [60 programs] had been evaluated independently to see whether they were successful or not," says an annoyed Klein. "They were just out there doing things. They may have been doing good, they may have been doing harm, and we have no way of knowing because nobody is evaluating them."

Klein suggests a serious danger lurks in not properly evaluating whether or not these gang programs really work. If one looks simply at the number of clients served by a program, a high number would seem like a positive sign, but it could be negative. Some anti-gang programs actually strengthen gang cohesiveness when gangs react as an "oppositional culture."

Robert Aguayo, a former gang member and deputy director of El Centro Del Pueblo (a substance-abuse center that services many L.A. gang members), suggests the importance of reaching at-risk youth on their own terms. At a recent panel discussion on AIDS in the gang community, Aguayo said: "One of the most difficult things is understanding [gang] lifestyle, understanding [gang] language, understanding how to communicate with them. If you cannot do that, it doesn't matter how good your message is, you're not going to be able to get it across to them. My sense is that although we're struggling with gang activity, [gangs are] a segment of the community that needs to be addressed and, to some degree, needs to be served."

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Historic eatery offers much more than just 'Mama Mia food'

"Serving" gangs – instead of exclusively criminalizing them – is a recent move, but not a new one. Diego Vigil, professor of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California at Irvine, says there was a concerted effort to reach gang members through intervention during the zoot-suit era. Though President Lyndon Johnson declared a "war on poverty" in the 1960s, America at the same time also declared a war on crime. Police departments took a militant attitude toward the problem, and funding for gang programs tilted in favor of suppression, leaving prevention and intervention with the short end of the stick.

Today, the scales have tipped again, especially following the 1992 Rodney King riots in L.A. At the time, LAPD Chief Daryl Gates and L.A. County Sheriff Sherman Block acknowledged suppression and law enforcement alone wouldn't be able to effectively combat the gang problem.

"We have a number of advisors," says Rice of her newly assembled group, "a number of veterans of the wars on gangs, and it's important that they're now agreeing that the rest of the spectrum has to be developed. Because they can't arrest their way out of it."

John Chavez, director of L.A. Bridges (a gang intervention and prevention program implemented by the city's Community Development Department), is pleased with the amount of money he gets from the mayor. "We're just glad to be in the sandbox playing with city law enforcement," he says.

But while the Bridges program seems to have all the right elements, combining parental involvement, schools, law enforcement, jobs, and economic development to combat youth interest in gangs, Vigil suggests the program suffered from politicization almost immediately. As a member of the original committee that formed L.A. Bridges in the mid-'90s, Vigil says the program's resources were defused by a fragmented city council whose members were only interested in how gangs affected their specific districts.

Fragmentation is an issue Rice's group will be looking into as well. "There are a lot of institutions involved," she says. "Are the [gang] programs coordinated? Do they work across departments? Is planning done in a synergistic and comprehensive way or is it silos within silos? What's the larger context of how these programs operate? And obviously they're going to involve a lot of issues that have nothing to do with city programs and a lot of institutions, including the school district, the county programs. We've got to look at this as a regional issue."

And so this giant task seems to only get bigger. But that's no reason to shy away from it, says Herb Wesson, councilman and vice-chair of the Gang Violence and Youth Development Committee.

"Peck, peck, peck," he says. "Take some components out [of the problem]. That's how you take a 15,000-foot mountain and make it into an 8,000-foot one." ★

04-13-06

Article Launched: 3/08/2006 12:00 AM

Council hires consultant for gang review

By Josh Kleinbaum, Staff Writer
LA Daily News

In the first step toward possibly creating a gang czar - a position the Valley's former top cop might want - the City Council voted Tuesday to spend \$465,000 to hire a consultant to help organize Los Angeles' anti-gang resources.

In a 13-0 vote, the council chose to bring in a group headed by activist attorney Connie Rice. Over the next six months to a year, the group will study all of the city's anti-gang programs and look at ways to determine how productive they are and how to hold them accountable.

Rice told the council her group will provide council members with charts showing what organizations exist, what they are doing, how they are working - or not working - together and how much they cost.

"From there, you will be able to make the right choice and go for the big solution," she said. "We've been fighting gangs for 30 years. There are five times as many gang members now as there were 30 years ago. We're doing something wrong."

Rice is not recommending a new department yet, but many city officials - including Police Chief William Bratton and Councilman Tony Cardenas - said they believe the city needs one to focus on gang violence.

"Whenever I talk to individual programs, the room gets kind of quiet when I ask about coordination and working with other organizations," Cardenas said. "If you had a department head, someone everyone answers to, the buck stops there. We should have done this a long time ago. This is long overdue."

If such a department is created, Cardenas, who chairs the council's ad-hoc committee on gang violence, said former LAPD Deputy Chief Ron Bergmann would be perfect for the job. And Bergmann is interested.

"It's come up in more than a couple different conversations, and it's been brought up in City Council by more than one council person," said Bergmann, who retired from the LAPD in July after 32 years on the force. "It's not something I would want to do until the day I die, but there is interest on my part."

As the top cop in the San Fernando Valley for more than four years, Bergmann understood that fighting crime involved intervention and prevention as well as enforcement. He formed the San Fernando Valley Coalition on Gangs, which tried to improve communication among anti-gang programs within the area.

"He'd certainly be a strong candidate," Bratton said. "During his time with the department, he was creative in creating a number of key initiatives in the Valley, including the Jeopardy program and some of the better programs we have."

There are 38,811 gang members from 463 gangs documented in the county's CAL/GANG system, according to LAPD statistics. In 2005, gang members countywide were responsible for 244 homicides, 579 attempted homicides and 2,620 felony assaults.

The city spends about \$26 million on anti-gang programs, although city officials do not know how much bang they're getting for their buck. With little accountability, they don't even know exactly where all of the money goes.



Once Rice's group finishes its report, the decision on whether to create a new city department headed by a gang czar becomes a political football. Cardenas, who said he has mentioned the idea to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's office, said he believes he can put together a strong enough coalition to make it happen.

Deputy Mayor for Homeland Security and Public Safety Maurice Suh said the Mayor's Office had not decided yet whether to push for a separate department.

"I don't want to presage what Connie Rice is doing by saying we are either for or against the gang department," Suh said. "We're going to value her opinion and not prejudge."

"The big issue for us is whether the gang department would receive a constant, steady stream of funding it would need to remain effective. That's the big issue."

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From the Los Angeles Times

Study: Effort to Rid L.A. of Gangs Is Failing

A nonprofit says anti-gang programs lack focus and that the city should target the problem's root causes.

By Patrick McGreevy
Times Staff Writer

August 3, 2006

The city of Los Angeles is losing the battle against street gangs because it has failed to properly fund and focus efforts to keep youngsters from joining gangs in the first place, a study released Wednesday has found.

The study by the Advancement Project, a nonprofit group, suggested that the 23 antigang programs spread throughout various city departments and costing \$82 million annually be put under a single authority.

"You've had a pretty ad hoc, scattered, incoherent approach to the problem," civil rights attorney Connie Rice, co-author of the study, told the council's Ad Hoc Committee on Gang Violence and Youth Development. "Somebody needs to be responsible. There needs to be centralized accountability."

Rice said the last phase of the study, to be completed by the end of the year, will look at possible models for better coordination of anti-gang programs, including appointing a gang czar at City Hall, creating a city department, reorganizing an existing city office or convening a task force.

The Los Angeles City Council commissioned the study in response to a continuing plague of gang violence in recent years, despite increases in spending on anti-gang efforts.

"We frankly haven't gotten gang violence under control at all," said Councilwoman Janice Hahn, a committee member.

Bureaucratic problems that have stymied the efforts were highlighted Wednesday when the council had to take emergency action in response to reports that more than 40 anti-gang workers in the L.A. Bridges program have not been paid for a month.

The study cited city reports that the vast majority of anti-gang funding, \$56 million, has gone to suppression programs aimed at the arrest, incarceration and containment of gang members, with only a small amount going to prevention and intervention programs.

"What you are saying is if you have a better balance of intervention and prevention, what you have is less need for some dollars in suppression," Councilman Tony Cardenas, committee chairman, said to Rice during Wednesday's hearing on the study. "So what you are doing is you are being much more efficient and effective in utilizing public funds."

The use of injunctions to limit gang activity has resulted in "over-broad enforcement" and an "unclear exit strategy" for former gang members to be removed from an injunction.

Researchers mapped out neighborhoods where gang violence is greatest and found a correlation in many cases with high school dropout rates and poverty.

City efforts must better address those root causes, the study said.

"It is about the conditions in the neighborhoods that allow the gangs to dominate," Rice said.

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Article Launched: 8/03/2006 12:00 AM

Copy of Report: Gang fighting efforts too disjointed

3-part study to examine effectiveness

BY SUSAN ABRAM, Staff Writer
LA Daily News

Although public and private groups have spent \$82 million to fight gangs in Los Angeles, the programs have had only limited success because of disjointed funding, a lack of accountability and poor coordination, a report released Wednesday says.

The first in a three-phase study by The Advancement Project said organizations have thrown money at gang programs - \$26 million on prevention or intervention and \$56 million on suppression - without gauging the effectiveness of the programs.

"The city does not have any entity to address youth violence and gangs," said Connie Rice, a noted civil rights attorney and co-director of the project. "While you have great individuals doing tremendous work, you have no entity, no department assessing the problems."

In March, the city allocated more than \$450,000 to fund the report by the nonprofit consulting group. An additional \$123,000 was approved Wednesday by the City Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Gang Violence and Youth Development to continue with the report, the second phase of which will be released in the fall.

Police estimate there are 463 gangs with 38,811 members in Los Angeles County. In 2005, gang members were responsible for 244 homicides, 579 attempted homicides and 2,620 felony assaults countywide.

As of May, gang-related crime in Los Angeles was down 13 percent from the comparable period five years earlier, according to Los Angeles Police Department statistics. Police say programs like Jeopardy, geared toward at-risk youth, are working.

But the report presented to the City Council committee said more research is needed to determine if those types of programs are effective.

Meanwhile, violent crime dropped between 3 percent and 7 percent in areas where gang injunctions - which allow gang members to be arrested for meeting in certain neighborhoods and limit their ability to loiter - have been enforced.

There were eight injunctions filed in 2001; the 30th was recently filed.

"The city attorney has said this a very important tool for the LAPD to use, but it's only one component in the battle against gangs," said Jonathan Diamond, spokesman for City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo. "We don't argue that it's a silver bullet. It's a piece of the enforcement puzzle."

The report also found that, based on 2005 statistics, gang hot spots are more likely where the per-capita income is less than \$30,000; where fewer than 30 percent of the population have high school diplomas; and where more than 80 percent of the neighborhood is rental housing.

Councilman Tony Cardenas, who formed and chairs the committee, said he wants city leaders to be held accountable for not reaching their goals.

Once Rice's group finishes the report, the decision on whether to create a new city department headed by a gang czar will be discussed. Cardenas, who has said he has mentioned the idea to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's office, said he believes he can put together a strong enough coalition.

"Every politician talks about getting tough on gangs, but what I'm doing is getting tough on our own departments," Cardenas said. "Suppression isn't where the money needs to go. It needs to go toward prevention."

L.A.'s latest gang-related shooting was Tuesday night, when a 20-year-old man was killed during what appears to have been a revenge attack in Westchester, police said.

The San Fernando Valley's latest gang shooting was Saturday, when a 20-year-old Reseda man was fatally shot at a house party in Canoga Park.

"I've had five homicides in the last two months in my area," said City Councilman Bill Rosendahl, whose district includes Brentwood, Marina del Rey, Pacific Palisades, Venice and Westchester.

"This is not about being soft on crime, or soft on youth," he said of the need to direct more funding toward prevention. "This is about holding everyone accountable. If we're going to get tough on gangs, we have to be tough on ourselves."

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From the Los Angeles Times

Bratton Wants a 'Gang Czar' to Coordinate Efforts

LAPD chief says he agrees with a report saying programs need centralized oversight.

By Patrick McGreevy

Times Staff Writer

August 5, 2006

Citing a study critical of Los Angeles' anti-gang efforts, Police Chief William J. Bratton called Friday for a "gang czar" and a new office to oversee the more than 20 existing, but scattered, programs.

"We spend over \$80 million a year on gang prevention and intervention in this city, and it's a mess. Nobody coordinates it," Bratton said in his regular appearance on KTLA-TV Channel 5.

At a news conference later, Bratton said he agrees with the findings of a report released earlier this week by the Advancement Project, a nonprofit group that called for centralizing the oversight of the 23 intervention and prevention programs operated by various city departments.

"I support the idea of the creation of the position of gang czar, somebody we in the Police Department could go to: one person, one place to really coordinate our police operation with those prevention and intervention operations," Bratton said.

The chief added that the LAPD would remain in charge of suppression efforts.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa plans to appoint a gang advisory group and bring in an expert to help him determine whether the czar idea has merit, according to Deputy Mayor Maurice Suh.

Among the questions to be answered: how much power and authority should such an official have, to whom should that person report and should a new department be formed, officials said.

"It is unclear what a gang czar would look like, but we will be studying that idea and others," Suh said.

The Advancement Project is also planning to report later this year on whether a czar should be appointed or whether the oversight should take some other form, according to civil rights attorney Connie Rice, a co-author of the report.

Bratton said some after-school programs aimed at keeping young people out of gangs are working, but he questioned whether others were worth the money.

"If somebody is not doing a good job, what the hell do you want to give them any money for?" he said to reporters.

The chief said his department has succeeded in reducing gang violence by 50% from the 1990s. In the early years of the last decade, he said, Los Angeles saw 500 gang-related homicides annually, and now the number is down to about 250.

"We are doing a pretty good job on the police side of it, but all the intervention/prevention which we can be part of in this city — quite frankly, it's all over the place," Bratton said. "It needs much better coordination."

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Valley gang violence soars

36 killings already equal to last year's total, according to police

BY BETH BARRETT, Staff Writer
LA Daily News

Article Last Updated: 10/18/2006 10:31:34 PM PDT

Gang-related violence has soared in the San Fernando Valley, with 36 killings in the past 10 months and gang crime in some neighborhoods up 50 percent over last year, the Daily News has learned.

The killings account for half of all of the 72 Valley homicides reported through Wednesday and already equal last year's total, according to Los Angeles Police Department data.

While gang crimes in Central and South Los Angeles still lead the region, the Valley has had 915 gang-related crimes through the first week of September - up from 688 - and has had the highest rate of increase of any part of the city during that time.

"It's been pretty crazy," said William "Blinky" Rodriguez, executive director of Communities in Schools and a veteran of gang intervention efforts in the Valley. "I haven't seen a cycle like this. Here we are in October, and all our staff that deals with hard-core violence is beat up.

"We've helped a lot of mothers bury their kids."

The violence comes as officials say the number of documented gangs in the Valley has ballooned to 80 with about 20,000 members - up from 70 with about 15,000 members just five years ago.

Through the first week of September, gang-related crimes were up 39 percent in Van Nuys and 50 percent in West Valley.

There have been eight gang killings in Van Nuys to date, compared to five in 2005; six in the West Valley already match last year's total.

Valley police resources, from motor to vice cops, have been refocused on the violence and extra squads from south of Mulholland - where gangs got their first toehold - are being deployed in Valley hot spots.

While there are 87 gang-detail officers, supervisors, detectives and others dedicated to the effort, it's still only one officer for every 230 gang members in the Valley.

Some experts said the recent gang-crime spike may reflect the Valley's relatively stable statistics for the last few years, as well as spillover from other areas of the city that have stepped-up enforcement.

But Connie Rice, a civil rights attorney and co-director of The Advancement Project, said it reflects a "tipping point" where gangs not only are initiating members with violence but also are committing more sophisticated crimes aimed at the middle class.

"There are gang-dominated hot spots in the Valley where children are not free to walk," Rice said.

Limited success

Rice's project recently concluded \$82 million in public and private money that has been spent on fighting gangs citywide has met with limited success.

Lacking in the Valley and throughout the city is a strategic approach to fighting gangs - from intervention efforts to coordination of neighborhood services and programs to keep kids from joining.

"There's not the resources to scale and they're not being used strategically," Rice said.

Gang hot spots

Among Valley gang-crime hot spots is North Hollywood, which has had seven gang-related homicides so far this year, up from just four last year.

North Hollywood Lt. Greg Baltad, in charge of the division's gang impact team, said the level of violence in the Valley is unprecedented.

"We have a propensity to violence I haven't seen in this division ... in 25 years on the job. I've never seen in the San Fernando Valley the readiness to use firearms on one another. It's a degeneration of value of life.

"They're the crop that we grew ... It's a societal problem."

Baltad said more resources are being used to combat the violence, including using property-crime officers and borrowing from Metro and other Valley divisions.

Rodriguez said there are more young boys on Valley streets and not enough resources to provide lifestyle alternatives.

"We have so much testosterone out there on the streets, there are kids all over the place and limited resources," Rodriguez said. "There's

obviously a bigger need for help out here in the Valley."

A dangerous time

Rodriguez said the assessment from gang intervention workers in the streets is that the violence has been escalating as gang members try to protect themselves or earn dangerous reputations.

"It's more dangerous than it's been," he said.

Deputy Chief Michel Moore, the Valley's top commander, echoed the danger and called the trend troubling.

"The shootings are in public places, people walking up from a car to someone. And they're the more classic drive-by and vehicle-to-vehicle," Moore said. "Gang members are firing on other gang members, and in too many instances on people who are not gang members."

And there is anecdotal evidence that the rite of passage into a gang is becoming increasingly bloody, LAPD gang detail officers say.

"There's a recklessness on the part of these gang members," Moore said, noting some lack strong leaders and others may be destabilized by violent recruitment efforts. "It's a very dangerous time."

"One gang's effort to recruit will spark a rivalry; a retaliation occurs from another gang ... and they go tit for tat."

The trend marks a sharp contrast to previous Valley gang-crime trends. Through January, for example, Valley gang-related crime was down 14 percent compared to a year ago.

"We probably have more ground to lose than other parts of the city," Moore said.

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What's next

The San Fernando Valley Coalition on Gangs, Communities in Schools, the Los Angeles Police Department and other sponsors will hold a peace march Oct. 28 to draw attention to gang prevention efforts. Starting at 9 a.m. at North Hills Community Park, the march will end with a softball tournament, health fair and refreshments at Sepulveda Recreation Center.

county government to the education, economic, law enforcement, civic, family and neighborhood sectors, must coordinate their efforts to reduce violence. It will take saturation strategies that don't leave children to face gangs by themselves. It will mean the end of bureaucracy and ineffective expenditures as we know them. And it will require the end of the gang culture of destruction.

Most of all, it will require guts from political leaders who care more about ending this deadly scourge than the safe posturing needed for their next run for office.

We must tell bureaucrats, school officials and civic leaders to change their missions and how they do their jobs. And we must tell parents and families to get their acts together.

But above all else, we must stop leaving the children of the kill zones to dodge bullets and to just "get over it."

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Gang czar needed

Strong leadership required to fix uncoordinated, underfunded and ineffective efforts

Article Last Updated:12/14/2006 08:31:20 PM PST

IMAGINE trying to cook a single Christmas dinner with 20 chefs in 20 kitchens - and none with any idea what the others are doing or enough ingredients to produce anything worthwhile. The result is likely to be a disaster.

That's exactly how Los Angeles has gone about dealing with the city's serious gang crime problem. And the result, of course, has been a disaster.

Los Angeles scatters a paltry \$26 million a year on various anti-gang programs and efforts. There are prevention programs to get kids before they join gangs, and there are intervention programs to get kids after they've joined gangs. There are police gang-fighting teams. There are 26 gang injunctions. And there are lots of other disconnected and equally ineffective efforts in place.

Earlier this year, the city hired civil-rights lawyer Connie Rice to figure out what resources exist and how well they are doing. The results of this study are expected out early next year.

The certainty is that she will sharply criticize the muddled and failed approach to the gang problem and offer a host of solutions.

What's needed first and foremost is a gang czar.

The concept of appointing one person to manage all of Los Angeles' multiple, though disconnected, anti-gang resources is not a new idea. But it is one that's gained currency recently among the city's top crime fighters. And it is the right time for it.

The Los Angeles Police Department already knows that coordinating resources helps fight gangs. In light of the alarming trend of racially motivated killings and the overall increase in gang violence in the San Fernando Valley this year, the LAPD has reached out to the FBI, youth clubs and community groups for help.

Having one person accountable for the city's many tools in the struggle against gangs is not just a good idea, it's essential.

True to its usual practices, City Hall has played politics with the gang issue for decades, even as thousands of lives have been lost. City Hall never provides enough money or leadership into eliminating L.A.'s single biggest crime problem.

City Councilman Tony Cardenas and Police Chief William Bratton have both suggested the czar idea. It's time the rest of the city's leaders, including and especially Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, start getting serious about this problem.

To be sure, there's no magic bullet to suppressing gangs and gang crime in Los Angeles. The schools, churches, neighborhoods all have a role to play along with the police, probation officers and others who routinely deal with aspects of the problem.

There's no secret about what must be done. The gang culture must be destroyed, and that means a total and well-coordinated community effort to provide jobs, activities, education and hope to the thousands of youths who join gangs every year.

And that will never happen without strong, effective and coordinated leadership pulling together the entire retinue of anti-gang weapons available.

Los Angeles could use a gang czar, and fast

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Imagine trying to cook a single Christmas dinner with 20 chefs in 20 kitchens -- and none with any idea what the others are doing or enough ingredients to produce anything worthwhile. The result is likely to be a disaster.

That's exactly how Los Angeles has gone about dealing with the city's serious gang crime problem. And the result, of course, has been a disaster.

Los Angeles scatters a paltry \$26 million a year on various anti-gang programs and efforts. There are prevention programs to get kids before they join gangs, and there are intervention programs to get kids after they've joined gangs. There are police gang-fighting teams. There are 26 gang injunctions. And there are lots of other disconnected and equally ineffective efforts in place.

Earlier this year, the city hired civil-rights lawyer Connie Rice to figure out what resources exist and how well they are doing. The results of this study are expected out early next year.

What's needed first and foremost is a gang czar.

The concept of appointing one person to manage all of Los Angeles' multiple, though disconnected, anti-gang resources is not a new idea. But it is one that's gained currency recently among the city's top crime fighters. And it is the right time for it.

The Los Angeles Police Department already knows that coordinating resources helps fight gangs as well as reaching out to the FBI, youth clubs and community groups for help.

Having one person accountable for the city's many tools in the struggle against gangs is not just a good idea, it's essential.

True to its usual practices, City Hall has played politics with the gang issue for decades, even as thousands of lives have been lost. City Hall never puts enough money or leadership into eliminating L.A.'s single biggest crime problem.

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