

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

## Cities Keep Enforcing Curfews for Teens, Despite Evidence They Don't Stop Crime

Source: Josiah Bates, Time.com, September 22, 2022

Philadelphia has had a curfew for kids and teenagers since the 1950s, but faced with a second straight year of record homicides and surging violent crime, the city is doubling down on its efforts to get minors off the streets at night.

A new ordinance expanded the city's 10 p.m. curfew to 16 and 17-year-olds (previously, they could be out until midnight), and police also stepped up enforcement of the curfew ordinances, community activists and residents tell TIME—picking up more kids and issuing more fines to parents.

For 14-year-old Brian Lemon in North Philly, this means that he's been detained six times for curfew violations this year. One night, he says, cops picked him up less than 30 seconds after the 10 p.m. curfew, as he was walking home from a friend's house. "They grabbed me like I killed somebody, like they saw me with a gun or something," he says.

Most of the time officers just brought him home, but twice police issued \$500 fines to his mother for allowing her son to be out late. He says the fines have been particularly hard to bear. "Most people probably don't got that much money for your kids to just be outside. That's enough money for food in the fridge and clothes on our backs," Brian says.

Across the country, more local leaders and police are turning to curfews for teenagers in an effort to tamp down violent crime, which has surged across the country since 2020. This summer, Chicago expanded their youth curfew laws and increased enforcement by law enforcement. Other major cities, including Los Angeles, Houston, and Atlanta also have youth curfews in place.

In September, officials in Prince George's County, Md., outside of Washington, D.C., began enforcing a 10 p.m. curfew for anyone under 17 on the weekdays, and midnight on weekends. The announcement was in response to Labor Day weekend violence where four people were killed in shootings, including a 15-year-old girl.

"At this point, these kids don't just need a hug, they need to be held accountable," County Executive Angela Alsobrooks said at a Sept. 5 press conference. "I know it's not a popular thing to say, but it's a fair question: Where are their parents? Where are the aunties, where are the uncles and other family members who are responsible for them?"

While it may sound like a common sense idea to get kids home and off the streets at night, researchers say that there is no evidence that curfews reduce crime. And community leaders worry that increasing police contact with teens from disadvantaged communities, especially Black teens, could lead to more arrests—and more kids being roped into the criminal justice system for minor infractions.

"There are a handful of studies that have been done on juvenile curfews and unfortunately the overall conclusion is they don't really have an impact," Dave Myers, the chair of the criminal justice department at the University of New Haven says. "They tend to be popular at face value. They sound good, look good, and are easy to implement but as far as an impact on crime it's not there."

### Are curfews effective for stopping crime?

The crime numbers from before and after Philadelphia's new curfew rules bear this out. In July 2022, when the updated curfew was in effect, most violent crimes did not decrease compared to the same month a year earlier, and certain crimes increased drastically. Robberies with a gun went up 72%, other types of robberies increased by 40%, and auto thefts went up 29%.

Brian Lemon says crime has always been a problem in his neighborhood, but this year he says he and others in the community have noticed a dramatic spike in violence—especially from juveniles.

"It's a bunch of young kids, like 12-year-olds," he says. "It's eye-opening because I'm seeing a lot more armed robberies and [people] taking cars with guns. Before they used to just hop in the car and nobody gets harmed, but now people want to kill somebody and take the car."

But, research casts doubt on the efficacy of juvenile curfews. A 2015 study by professors at the University of Virginia and Purdue University looked at the impact of youth curfews on gun violence in Washington D.C. Their analysis found the effect on public safety was “ambiguous,” and even suggested that curfews could increase the levels of violence.

“We find that, contrary to its goal of improving public safety, D.C.’s juvenile curfew increases the number of gunfire incidents by 69% [during curfew hours],” the study says. A 2016 study published by the Campbell Collaboration, a nonprofit criminal justice research group, found that these types of curfews do not reduce crime or victimization.

Studies also show that juvenile crime tends to happen during the day. It typically peaks after school hours, and drops dramatically at night.

So why are cities still turning to this tactic? “Nobody is really going to argue that it’s a good thing for kids to be out on the streets after 10 p.m.,” Myers of the University of New Haven says. “The problem is, that doesn’t translate into something like it’s going to have an effect on gun violence.”

### **Concerns about over-policing**

Paul Elam is the Chief Strategy Officer for the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI), a nonprofit organization that works on issues including juvenile crime and community violence. He says curfews target a broad section of the population—in an effort to stop a handful of problem teenagers, who are likely to ignore curfews anyway. “For example, if we’re in a community that has 100,000 people the estimates are that there are only 30 to 40 that are carrying weapons and committing crimes,” Elam says. “In a general deterrence theory, a curfew just doesn’t make sense. There’s no data or theory that really supports the approach.”

In Philadelphia, the curfew rules have run into opposition from some community groups. “The reason a lot of us oppose the curfew is that it’s specific communities that become over-policed without having any real impact on crime,” James Aye, who runs a youth organization in Philadelphia called Yeah Philly that provides services for teens in the city who are exposed to poverty and violence. “The police have better things to be doing than worrying about some young people walking to and from the store.”

Aye says that the updates to the curfew enforcement didn’t include enough participation from community members, which is emblematic of the dynamic between poor minority communities and law enforcement.

Research suggests that when Black teens are in contact with police, even over minor infractions like curfew violations, it can have detrimental effects—including over-policing later in life. A Johns Hopkins University study published in 2021 in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that exposure to police is associated with several detrimental health outcomes for Black kids and teenagers, including mental health issues.

“Black youth in the U.S. experience disproportionate contact with police even when accounting for criminal or delinquent behavior, which some experts say is fueled by racism and discrimination,” the study says. “Evidence shows that police exposures are associated with adverse health outcomes for Black youth.”

Rather than police officers arresting and rounding up all the kids they find on the street after a curfew, experts and community members argue for more direct engagement with the community from law enforcement, as well as more proactive investigations to stem violent crime. That’s separate from addressing the socio-economic factors that play a role in crime and gun violence.

For kids and teens, participation in community-based programs or after-school activities has been shown to reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior, experts say.

For now, Brian, the 14-year-old in North Philly, says the police crackdown on Philadelphia’s curfew makes him and his friends feel targeted. “I feel as though our voices are not being heard and if it is being heard then people just don’t really care,” he says. “It makes Black kids feel like it’s not even worth talking about our experiences.”

### **Possible Response Questions**

- What are your thoughts about curfews for teens? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.