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The Boston Globe

Metro

Patrick directs \$9.7m to violence reduction

By **Brian Ballou** GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 14, 2011

A week after appealing to legislators to adopt tougher illegal gun penalties, Governor Deval Patrick unveiled a \$9.7 million grant initiative yesterday to fund programs to reduce youth violence in 11 municipalities across the state.

“What this initiative is about is working more closely with local officials, not-for-profits, community activists, and organizers . . . to identify what is working and what is not working and then to develop a more organic plan to meet those young people where they are,” Patrick said in a phone interview.

He said the measure would focus on 14- to 24-year-old males.

In Boston, the initiative would focus on bringing more street workers to violence-plagued communities and creating more jobs for youths, he said. Boston will get the largest chunk of the funds, about \$2.3 million.

Chelsea and Lowell will each get \$900,000, and Springfield, Lawrence, New Bedford, and Fall River will each get \$800,000. Brockton, Holyoke, Lynn, and Worcester will also receive money.

Together, the grants will directly serve about 1,000 youths; the funds will also support their family members, including children and siblings, according to a statement from the governor’s office. The money will be allocated in two installments.

Patrick has been active this year campaigning for measures to reduce youth violence. In March, he visited Roca, a nonprofit agency in Chelsea that counsels youths. There, he sat with teens for about an hour, listening to their concerns.

Last week when he addressed the Legislature's Joint Committee on the Judiciary, Patrick said his bill would target the increase of illegal guns by designating three new gun-related crimes: assault and battery with a firearm, assault with a firearm, and a felony in possession.

He said the measure would "give law enforcement the tools they need to stop the most dangerous, violent criminals and take high-impact illegal weapon holders out of our communities."

In pushing for the bill, Patrick invoked the memory of 13-year-old Steven Odom, who was gunned down while walking home from a basketball court in Dorchester in 2007. "These stories are repeated too often throughout the Commonwealth," he told lawmakers.

Emmett Folgert, director of the Dorchester Youth Collaborative, an antiviolence agency that works with at-risk teens, said yesterday that the urgency needed to target the problem has been "a long time coming."

"The governor made statewide violence prevention one of his four initiatives, and a lot of work has gone into this," Folgert said. "One thing I especially like is that this initiative gives us the ability to go into hot spots, into the homes of impact players, and extend services to the brothers of impact players. Workers can offer real stuff, like summer jobs or camps."

He said studies have shown that male siblings of impact players - those who are most apt to commit or facilitate crimes - often drift toward violence, as well.

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