

Ideas on juvenile prevention differ only on when to begin

■ Agreement emerges in a three-day legislative workshop on steering youths from crime, but how early to intervene is an issue

By MICHELLE ROBERTS
of The Oregonian staff

In the wake of last year's deadly shooting in Thurston High School in Springfield, a groundswell of bipartisan support for juvenile crime prevention has emerged only days into the 70th Oregon Legislature.

But a political debate is forming over how early intervention efforts must begin: in the classroom or in the womb?

1999 Legislature

■ Juvenile justice
"The roots of violence begin in the womb," Robin Karr-Morse, author of "Ghosts from the Nursery," told a packed Senate Judiciary Committee room Thursday. "Violence can be entrenched in a child by preschool."
The Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday concluded a three-day workshop exploring the issue of juvenile crime prevention. More than a third of the legislative body attended the sessions, in which national experts lectured about every-

House Bill 2268

- THE ISSUE: Early childhood intervention to prevent juvenile crime.
- THE STATUS: In the House Human Resources Committee.
- THE PLAYERS: New legislation, sponsored by Rep. Kevin Mannix, R-Salem

thing from juvenile crime rates to infant brain development.

"I have never seen such immediate support by so many legislators around any other issue," said Rep. Lane Shetterly, R-Dallas.

The governor's initiative

Gov. John Kitzhaber spearheaded the discussion when he unveiled his \$30 million High-Risk Juvenile Crime Prevention Partnership, which would allocate money to counties to develop programs for troubled youths who come to the attention of teachers and police.

Although many lawmakers have indicated they support the governor's plan, some contend it must be broadened to include prevention programs for the youngest of the young.

"There are concerns that the governor's proposal doesn't do enough

for early intervention," Shetterly said.

Kitzhaber's proposed budget also includes \$3.5 million to expand Oregon pre-kindergarten programs and \$7 million for home visits to foster early childhood development, but some lawmakers would like to see the approach streamlined. "The issue is how we distribute our intervention throughout the continuum of life," said Rep. Kevin Mannix, R-Salem, who has introduced the first major piece of legislation dealing with the issue of juvenile crime prevention. He is chairman of the House Judiciary Committee — Criminal Law.

His legislation, House Bill 2268, would provide \$30 million for Kitzhaber's High-Risk Juvenile Crime Prevention Partnership but also would include more than \$72 million for social programs aimed specifically at infants and toddlers.

"We can't ignore any one part of the continuum," Mannix said. "If you just sprinkle the resources around, no one has any success."

The financing package

The total financing package for HB2268, which has been forwarded to the House Human Resources Committee, is more than \$165 million. It includes funding for home visits for babies born in at-risk households, crisis relief nurseries

and after-school programs for children in several age groups.

Another bill dealing with the issue is expected to be proposed in the Senate within the next month. But no consensus has yet emerged on what form the proposed legislation will take. The Senate's proposed budget earmarks \$30 million for Kitzhaber's proposal.

"We are very committed to this," said Sen. Neil Bryant, R-Bend, chairman of the Judiciary Committee. "The fact that we have and the governor have both allocated \$30 million for this is no coincidence."

Steve Marks, Kitzhaber's chief adviser on criminal justice issues, said there is "more commonality than people realize" between the governor's vision for juvenile crime prevention and what some legislators have indicated they would like to see. Kitzhaber's efforts to implement juvenile crime prevention during the last legislative session did not pick up steam and ultimately failed.

"To have this level of interest this early in the session and to have key leaders moving forward is encouraging," Marks said.

He said the governor would support a bill provided it includes the governor's high-risk juvenile prevention program. The governor also has proposed \$20 million for alcohol and drug abuse-prevention programs.