

# District

EXTRA

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BY MARK GAIL — THE WASHINGTON POST

Partners Cheryle Rogers Brown and Stephen Liggon are part of a D.C. Superior Court effort to monitor young offenders' compliance with curfew.

## Did the Crime? Watch the Time.

*Come Curfew, Probation Officers Want to Find Young Offenders at Home*

By KEITH L. ALEXANDER  
Washington Post Staff Writer

**E**ach night, two by two, they scour the District's streets and alleys looking for juveniles who might be out after curfew.

They knock on doors, climb stairwells of apartment complexes and walk through housing projects to make sure that teenagers under court supervision are home.

They are juvenile probation officers,

part of the D.C. Superior Court's Social Services Division, verifying that the 1,700 youths in the District who are being monitored by a court order are off the streets.

The teens have been arrested for a crime and ordered to comply with the curfew. Some are on probation; others are awaiting trial or have pleaded guilty or been found guilty through a trial. Some are awaiting sentencing, possibly to a youth detention facility such as Oak Hill or to a homebound program.

Each team of probation officers drives around between 7 p.m. and midnight daily, with the names of young offenders who need to be monitored, in an effort to reduce juvenile violence in the District. The curfew patrols are critical to ensuring that youths are not on the streets, especially between 3:30 and 9 p.m., the hours when juvenile crime peaks, said Terri Odom, director of the Social Services Division.

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# Probation Officers Watch the Clock to Keep Crime Down

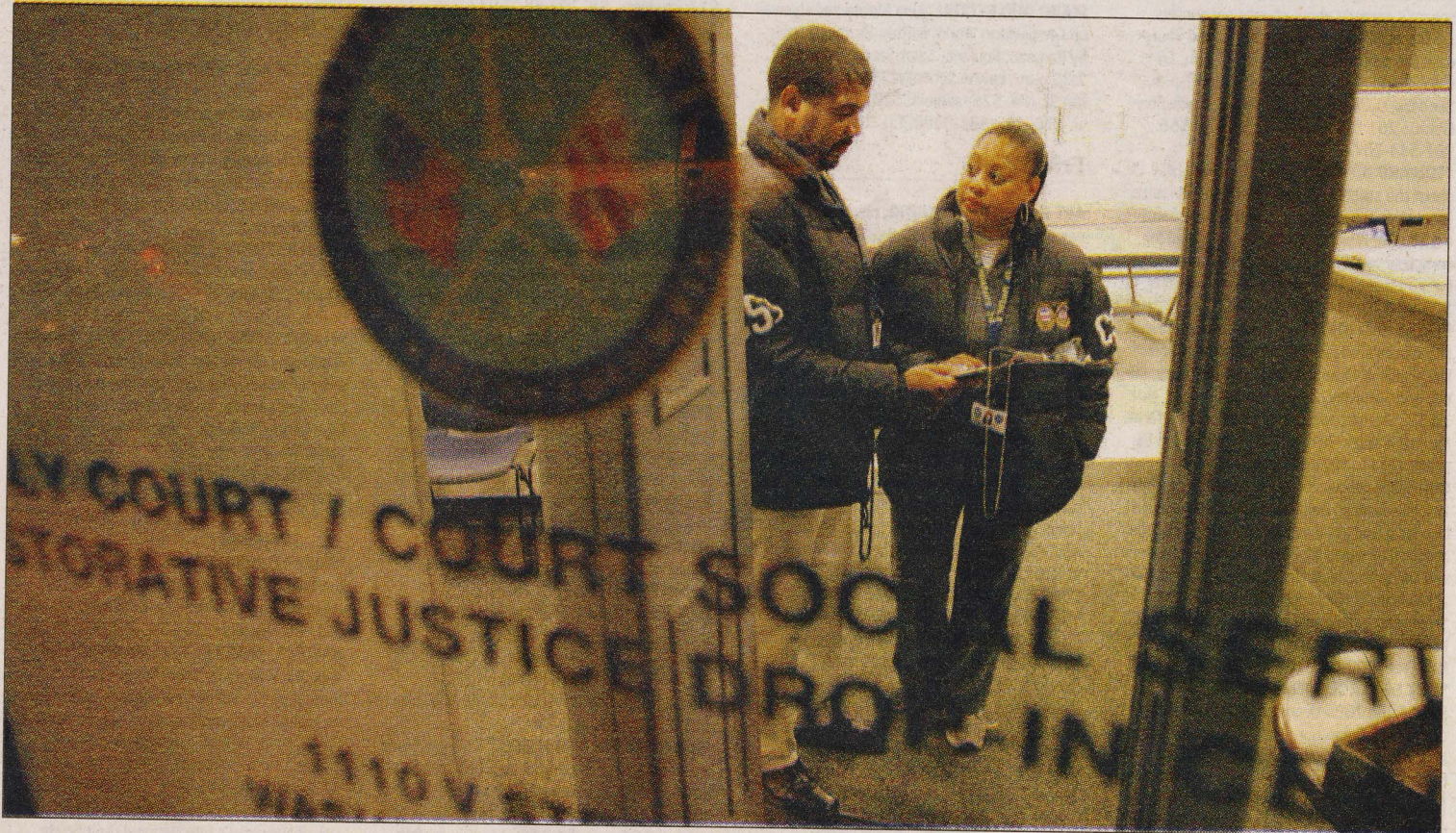
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The street-canvassing program, which started in 2005, employs 55 youth probation officers, most of whom have backgrounds in social work. Before the program began, probation officers checked in only with juveniles charged with violent crimes, once or twice a week. Focusing on juveniles involved in all crimes, Odom said, reduces the chances that the juveniles will become involved in more serious offenses.

"We realized we didn't just need to keep our eyes on serious offenders, but our medium- and low-risk offenders," Odom said. "When individuals involved in the juvenile and criminal systems know someone is watching them, they are less likely to offend and less likely to get into the same kind of trouble again."

Odom is proud of her program. She boasts that only 15 to 20 percent of male juveniles and 10 percent of females in her curfew program are arrested again for another violation.

If the juveniles fail to make curfew often, the officers might increase their checks to daily, or the juveniles could end up having to wear an ankle monitoring bracelet.



PHOTOS BY MARK GAIL — THE WASHINGTON POST

Probation officers Stephen Liggon and Cheryl Rogers Brown prepare to leave their office in Southeast Washington on a recent evening to make curfew checks. The partners try to maintain a low profile, carrying cellphones and a clipboard but keeping their badges in their pockets.



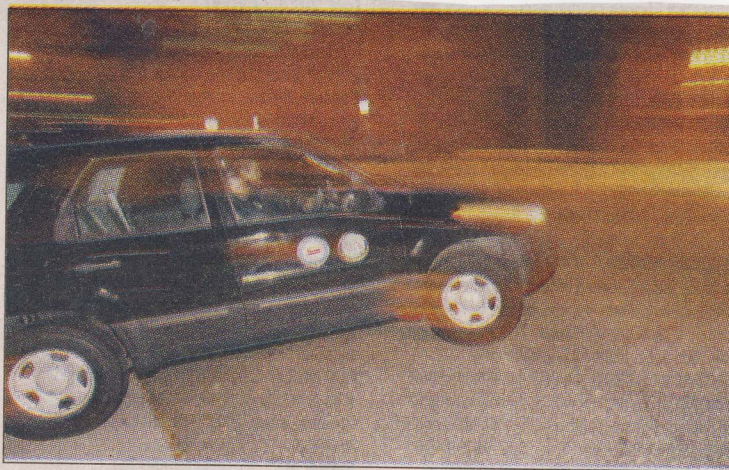
The group oversees teens primarily between the ages of 15 and 18 who have committed crimes such as auto theft or simple assault. There is a special unit that monitors violent youths and another that focuses on girls. The youngest recently was a 9-year-old girl arrested for stealing a car.

By going into the juveniles' homes and schools, the officers believe they can better assess the environment in which the youths live. For example, if an officer finds that a youth has an abusive parent or one who is on drugs, that information can be relayed to a judge to help determine whether a juvenile would be better off removed from the home and placed in a shelter or another facility.

Stephen Liggon has been a juvenile probation officer for 26 years. His partner, Cheryl Rogers Brown, has been on the streets of D.C. for 15 years. Down Suitland Parkway, across Jasper Place and then down Frederick Douglass Boulevard: The two know the neighborhoods, especially Southeast Washington, better than most veteran cabbies or ambulance drivers.

Liggon said that in comparison with the 1980s during the District's crack epidemic, kids aren't involved in as much drug activity. Nowadays it's more "carjacking and stealing," he said. But, he adds, "the danger is still there."

Going into high-crime neigh-



borhoods isn't always easy. None of the officers has run into any major difficulty. But if they arrive in a neighborhood they believe might be unsafe because there are dozens of teens on the streets, they contact local police officers first, asking the police to cruise through and show their presence.

When the probation officers go out, they carry cellphones and a clipboard with a sheet that has the juvenile's name, telephone number and probation officer's name. They keep their court badges inside their pockets because the badges attract too much attention.

If the juvenile is home, he or she signs the officer's sheet. If the youth is not home, an adult, usually a parent or guardian, has to sign to say that the youth was not

home. That information is passed to the juvenile's probation officer and later to the judge overseeing the case.

On a recent evening, Liggon and Brown arrive at their first house, on Stanton Road in Southeast. Brown whips out her cellphone, calls the house and asks to speak to the youth. A woman answers and says her son is not home. Brown then identifies herself, and the woman says her son is in front of the house, where Brown and Liggon are parked. The two officers look around; the young man is nowhere to be found. It's 8:30 p.m., and the youth was supposed to be home by 6.

As Liggon and Brown prepare to pull away, the youth runs up to their dark-blue minivan. His moth-



er called him on his cellphone to tell him the officers were there. The officers long ago discovered that many parents cover for their teens. (The Post agreed not to identify juveniles or family members because of privacy issues.)

"That's what is so surprising sometimes. It's not their older brothers and sisters who cover for them, it's often grown men and women. They lie for them all the time," Brown said.

When the night air is above 60 degrees, whether there is school the next day or not, it's often more difficult to find many of the kids home, the officers have found.

On a recent Monday evening trip with the temperature around 62 degrees, the officers found youths at home at only four of the 15 residences they visited.

Meanwhile, across town, two

other officers, Jermaine Arrington and Freddie Valentin, are riding through the streets of Northwest and Northeast D.C. Valentin, who is Latino, works with the non-English-speaking families whose teens are becoming more involved in local Latino gangs such as MS-13. Arrington and Valentin visit the more

violent youth, juveniles who are charged with assaults, armed robberies and even murder.

Together, the two officers seem comfortable in their roles. Valentin smiles and greets each family member when he arrives. Arrington, a Washington native, is more stern and rarely smiles.

"The biggest challenge is making these kids know that we're here to help them not hurt them," Arrington said. "I try to serve as a mentor, not just a probation officer."

Each night, the routine is similar. "Curfew check," Valentin says when a young man in the Washington Highlands section of Southeast D.C. asks who's knocking at the front door. Neighbors sitting outside laugh and joke at the common sight. "Probation yo, probation," a neighbor says.