

**John Gioia
Chair, Board of Supervisors
Contra Costa County
Board Organization Speech
January 10, 2006**



NEW YEAR WITH NEW CHALLENGES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

I'm looking forward to a productive year working with my dedicated colleagues on the Board and our newly selected County Administrator John Cullen. The Board unanimously has full faith in John Cullen's leadership to work with us to move this County forward through challenging issues. I also look forward to working with John Sweeten for the next two months to make this transition occur as smoothly as possible.

On behalf of our full Board, I want to restate our strong commitment to solving the County's current structural budget issue where our expenses have been growing faster than our revenues. This Board took a first step last month when we approved this County's first-ever finance reserve policy. While it was only a first step, it is a strong statement of this Board's resolve to insure that our County remains fiscally strong and able to provide the full range of services needed by our county residents.

Also, I know I speak for the Board when I want to say that we are ready, willing and able to spend whatever effort it takes to complete our labor negotiations in a way that continues to provide the best working environment and incentive for our employees while also achieving the fiscal goals that we need to attain to keep this County in a strong financial position.

The burden on closing this structural budget gap falls on everyone – the Board, department heads, all levels of management, and rank and file employees.

Consistent with this concept, I am proposing that we work with our County Administrator to immediately explore how to implement a new “Outcome and Performance-Based Compensation System” for executives and unclassified managers based on a similar successful program in San Diego County. Under this system, a manager’s salary may be adjusted up or down depending on whether they meet specific predetermined objectives. Under our current system, a “performance pay” increase essentially becomes permanent and is never reduced, even if that employee’s work is unsatisfactory.

I’m optimistic that the actions this Board takes over the course of the year will put the County in a stronger financial position.

While we face budget challenges, the work of the County goes on. We have great managers and great line staff who are involved in almost every type of public service imaginable. We have lots of opportunities to make all these services more meaningful and effective for the many residents we serve.

One area in which I plan to focus this year as Chair of the Board is violence prevention. While Contra Costa is one of the wealthiest counties in the state, we are also a county of two worlds – one world where poverty, violent crime and lower school performance are the top issues on peoples’ minds, and one world where violence, poverty, and low school performance are things that residents believe happen somewhere else. We’re also a County where violence, poverty, and low school performance disproportionately and adversely impact people of color.

In recent years, nearly two-thirds of all homicides in Contra Costa County occurred in the Richmond, North Richmond and San Pablo area, while that area represents less than 15% of the County's population.

While African-Americans and Latinos combined represent about 30% of our county's population, they represent almost 70% of the births to teenage mothers and 70% of the homicide victims in this county; they drop out of high school at rates that are 5 to 8 times the rate of white students; and they make up almost 60% of those serving time in our County jail.

What is most distressing is that the state of youth in this County also reflects this two-tier world.

In those parts of the county where violence is not an issue, most third graders are performing at or above grade level in English. For example, nearly 80% of 3rd graders in Orinda and Moraga are performing at or above grade level in English. In other areas of the county, including West County and Pittsburg, where violence and crime are significant issues, only around 20% of third graders perform at or above grade level. All the research clearly indicates that lower school performance increases the likelihood of future violent behavior.

50 to 60% of the children in the WCCUSD and Pittsburg School Districts come from lower income families and receive free and reduced cost lunches while only 1% of the students in the Acalanes and San Ramon School Districts come from low income families. Again, the research indicates that poverty greatly increases the likelihood of violence.

We should not tolerate the disparities between these two worlds. We need to take a stand against violent crime in any part of our county; we need to take a stand against failing school performance and high dropout rates anywhere in Contra Costa; and we need to take a

stand to prevent a new generation of youth from being exposed to risk factors that increase violence, wherever they live.

The tragedies of violence take a toll on all families in our county. We need to recognize that the quality of life for all Contra Costans depends on maintaining the highest quality of life in all regions and for all races and ethnicities, not just some.

We must reinvigorate our commitment to erase the geographic as well as racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our County.

In addition to the enormous community impacts of violence, every county taxpayer pays the bill for violence, wherever it occurs. Even before the perpetrator of a homicide walks into prison, we've already spent over \$165,000 to medically treat the victim and to prosecute the accused. By the time that perpetrator has served 20 years in prison, we've spent about \$1 million on them. That doesn't even count the huge impact on the families of those involved. It costs us \$40,000 a year to incarcerate someone in our County Jail and we spend less than \$10,000 a year to educate a child.

Addressing violence as a countywide issue is not new. In 1994, nearly 79% of Contra Costa voters approved a Board of Supervisors Advisory Measure to support a number of violence prevention recommendations and a county-wide effort to expand and coordinate violence prevention activities involving all city, county and school districts. We need to revive that effort.

In our County budget, where we spend nearly \$1 billion on criminal justice, health, social services and pre-school, there are many opportunities to make our existing programs more effective, focused and creative.

There are also many opportunities to leverage additional state, federal, foundation and private money to expand violence prevention activities. Two examples -- early mental health intervention and afterschool programs.

As we speak, our Health Department is currently expanding mental health services for youth with serious emotional and behavioral difficulties in the West Contra Costa School District. This intervention with school-age youth is effective in reducing aggressive and violent behavior in teenagers before they develop into permanent patterns of behavior. The funding source for these new services is one-half million dollars in federal and state mental health money and requires only a 5% local match, which in this case, is being provided by the school district.

Another example where we can access non-County dollars for violence prevention is our successful Afterschool for All Program. Over the last 5 years, this program and my office have worked with cities and school districts to obtain \$10 million in federal and state afterschool grants to the West Contra Costa, Pittsburg, Antioch and Mt. Diablo school districts. These grants have allowed thousands of youth to attend afterschool programs which are proven to reduce drug use, violence, truancy, school dropout and pregnancy and improve school performance and emotional health. The best news of all – these monies were obtained without a local county match other than the staff time and leadership in working with other agencies to apply for the grants.

There are millions more in federal and state afterschool dollars waiting to be accessed if we aggressively pursue them. Governor Schwarzenegger just announced in his State of the State message that an additional \$428 million in Proposition 49 afterschool funding will be available this year. We can play a major role helping cities and school districts draw down these valuable grants.

In my own district, I am working to leverage the use of a vacant county building in Richmond to be used as a Youth Center – a safe place where youth can go to learn new skills, access services, and have fun. Having safe spaces to be after school is one important solution to violence, and I'm working with private funders and local community agencies to make this project happen.

We can expand on these successes and do more to leverage resources, which will be especially important as we face fiscal challenges.

To help achieve this goal, I am establishing a Violence Prevention Ad Hoc Committee composed of Supervisor Glover and I to work with our County Departments and focus on three general areas:

First, how to better implement best practices in our existing violence prevention programs.

Second, how to aggressively leverage additional resources from federal, state, foundation and private sources to fund violence prevention,

Third, how to maximize partnerships with cities, school districts, and federal and state agencies in combating violence.

I propose these 6 specific issues that this new committee will consider first:

First, we investigate contracting with Rubicon, a nationally recognized non-profit mental health and substance abuse service provider based right here in Contra Costa, to have their non-profit landscape business perform grounds maintenance and landscape services for some of our many County facilities. This presents both cost savings opportunities for us and job creation opportunities for those County residents most in need of a job. Also, Rubicon will employ only Contra Costa residents who have successfully completed their substance abuse or mental health

program. They could also hire individuals just released from our County Jail who have successfully participated in the Sheriff's landscape program. Rubicon currently has contracts to perform landscape services with San Francisco, the City of Alameda, and the Veterans Administration. I can't think of two better objectives than saving county costs and providing a job opportunity for county residents.

Second, work with our D.A., Public Defender and EHSD to expand the "Clean Slate" program which provides legal counseling to remove barriers to employment, education and housing for those who have completed serving their time for certain types of convictions. If unable to gain employment or housing, these individuals are at greater risk of repeating the behaviors that led to their arrest and incarceration. The program has served 110 persons last fiscal year and expunged the crimes of 22 individuals, where it was appropriate. This "second chance" program has great potential to serve many more recently released individuals. This strategy was proposed in Richmond's recent Black-on-Black Crime Summit sponsored by faith leaders like Rev. Shumake and Rev. Newsome.

Third, call on all video game arcades in this County, including those in movie theaters, to remove any violent video games that are accessible to those under 18. Exposure to these violent video games increases aggressive emotions and actions and decreases positive social interactions.

Fourth, develop a program to increase early intervention mental health services in our Head Start pre-schools. Our Head Start program serves about 2500 pre-schoolers with 76% of them coming from single-parent families, 85% of them being children of color, and all of them coming from low-income families.

Fifth, develop a strategy for using Proposition 63 “early intervention and prevention” mental health funds for expanding school-based mental health services to at-risk youth. With these monies, we can access additional federal and state funds at a 19 to 1 match. These new funds are anticipated to become available later this year and may total several million dollars annually to our County.

Sixth, work to expand the Welcome Home Baby Program to provide home visits to 500 additional new mothers per year, adding to the current 700 per year. This would allow most of the mothers living in poverty to receive these vital services. Research has shown that home visitation programs are the most widely recommended and practiced strategy for child abuse prevention in the nation. Communities receive a large return on their investment when families are supported after the birth of the first baby and the likelihood of future violent behavior by that child is greatly reduced.

These proposals are only meant to be a start.

There is already great work going on in the area of violence prevention under the leadership of our department heads Sheriff Rupf, D.A. Bob Kochly, Chief Probation Officer Lionel Chatman, Public Defender David Coleman, Health Director Dr. Walker, EHSD Director John Cullen, Community Services Director Joe Valentine, and Welcome Home Baby Director Sherry Rufini. In my conversations with all of them on these issues, I know that they are fully committed to closing the gap that exists in our county, even in the face of challenging financial times.

I look forward to working with my fellow Board members and County Staff to make this a productive and enjoyable year.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to the residents of District One in West County who understand the positive role that government can play in solving community problems and have provided me the support and encouragement to take on difficult issues.