

MontCo gang-prevention programs may lose funding

By: [Rachel Baye](#) | 10/15/11 8:05 PM

Examiner Staff Writer

Programs that have helped reduce gang-related crimes in Montgomery County are being threatened as funding dries up.

Many of the programs, which focus on youth and gang violence, have been funded through federal and state grants, which expire next year. The county will need to find new funding -- maybe from Montgomery taxpayers -- if the programs are to stay.

Officials credit the programs with reducing crime in the county. Youth crimes -- those committed by anyone under age 22 -- have been declining from 3,844 in 2007 to 3,104 in 2010, and gang-related crimes are down from 285 in 2009 to 232 in 2010.

"We currently have several federal grants that assist us in a lot of our enforcement and prevention activities," Police Chief Tom Manger said. "The bad news is the federal money is drying up and it's ... unlikely that these federal grants will be continued."

The largest threat lies in the loss of the federal grants supporting the bi-county gang task force, a joint effort between Prince George's and Montgomery counties, Manger said. The Montgomery portion of the grants pays for police officers and patrol cars in Montgomery County and Takoma Park, a state's attorney, investigators in the Office of the State's Attorney, a correctional officer and a gang intervention and prevention program run by the county's Department of Health and Human Services.

Extracurricular programs aimed at keeping teens out of trouble when they're not in school are also at risk.

Preventative programs are often the first to go, said Councilman George Leventhal, D-at large.

"Every prevention program that we had in place has unfortunately been cut -- either scaled way back or has been cut altogether," Manger said. "It's not because we wanted to. It's not because it wasn't a valuable thing."

The fate of the programs may depend on how willing the council is to raise taxes at a time when residents are suffering, said Councilman Marc Elrich, D-at large.

"Our discussion has started with we're not raising any additional taxes," he said. "Barring a miracle in the economy, that means we're cutting programs."