Although Florida's community colleges have consistently been the primary access to college and post-secondary education for state residents and are uniquely suited to help dependent individuals gain the skills necessary to become self-sufficient, state funding to the colleges has consistently been reduced. Income per student from the state has been reduced from 50% more to 22% less than that provided to public K through 12 schools, and the passage of Proposition 2 severely restricts spending by the 1995 legislature. This threatens the colleges' ability to carry out their mission, but cost of supporting dependent individuals is high. In Dade County, for example, one in six residents were living in poverty as of the 1990 census, while the County's 1993 expenditures for food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children alone amounted to $479,706,672. Moreover, a correlation can be drawn between a person's level of education and the likelihood of engaging in crime (the cost of maintaining Florida's 44,000 prisoners is $1 billion over the term of their incarceration). Education is even more important in the Information Age, but statewide 54% of students entering community colleges test as academically underprepared. The state's community colleges provide an essential bridge to independence for residents, leading to further educational opportunities, employment, and higher salaries. Although the colleges represent a bargain compared to the costs of maintaining dependent residents, the state has abandoned its commitment to the colleges and is, in effect, starving the solution to Florida's most serious problems. (BCY)
STARVING SOLUTION

Robert H. McCabe. President. Miami-Dade Community College District
Starving the Solution
by Robert H. McCabe

the p 'wing under-
class of individuals
who are dependent
on society is threat-
ening the well-being of all
Floridians. Our state is be-
coming overwhelmed by
the cost of sustaining this
dependency. The number
of persons receiving Aid to
Families with Dependent
Children (AFDC) has been
rising at a rate of 20% a year
since 1988. The state's
Medicaid expenditure sky-
rocketed to almost two bil-
lion dollars by 1990 and
over $4.1 billion by 1993.
This was equal to the state
general revenue budget in
1980-81. Expenditures on
prison and law enforce-
ment are escalating expo-
nentially; in Dade County
alone, nearly one quarter
of our citizens are receiv-
ing public assistance—in
housing, health care, or
food stamps.

Florida has excep-
tional prospects for a
bright economic future as
the business connector to
the emerging nations of
the Caribbean and Central
and South America. How-
ever, the loss of our human
resources, because of lack
of skills, and the cost of
sustaining growing num-
bers of individuals in a de-
pendent status, threatens
to destroy that potential.

Florida's productive
and efficient community
colleges have been the pri-
mary access to college and
post-secondary education
for our residents. Commu-
nity colleges are uniquely
positioned to help depen-
dent individuals gain the
skills to become self-suffi-
cient, thus providing busi-
ness and industry with a
much needed quality work
force and saving Floridians
literally billions of dollars.
Despite the community
colleges' excellent record
of performance, the state
has consistently reduced
the resources that are pro-
vided to the community
student as the state univer-
sities.

The current level of
funding for community col-
leges threatens their capac-
ity to carry out their mis-
sion—Florida is, in effect,
starving the most promis-

![Graph showing community college funding per full-time student as a percentage of public school funding.](source: Miami-Dade Community College, District Administration Newsletter, November, 1994)
Supporting dependency has high costs and high risks to society as a whole. 

There are individuals in our own neighborhoods, in this land of plenty, who live in terrible circumstances. The growth of America’s underclass—fueled by increasing poverty, drugs, unemployment and breakdown in family life—is causing our social structure to crumble. Values we once held in high esteem are no longer relevant to our daily life which is plagued by crime, violence and disregard for basic rights. Our underpinnings of honor and duty—our good citizenship—seems to be meaningless to increasing numbers of our young people. The change in values and attitudes is vividly shown in a comparison of problems in schools, as reported by high school faculty, shown above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking out of turn</td>
<td>Drug Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chewing Gum</td>
<td>Alcohol Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Noise</td>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running in the Halls</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting in Line</td>
<td>Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress-Code Violations</td>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littering</td>
<td>Assault</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Florida Council of 100, Committee on the Justice System, November, 1994

All Americans are deeply concerned about the escalation of mindless violence and increasing numbers of incarcerations. In 1994, for the first time, there are over one million Americans incarcerated—the highest rate of any country other than Russia. Most Americans perceive that life has become fraught with danger.

A tour of Miami neighborhoods shows more and more blocked roads and gated complexes as we try to wall ourselves from the problems that surround us. The sight of homeless persons begging on our streets has become common, and their cardboard homes disgrace us all. Our poor communities are breeding grounds for disease, crime, and drugs, all of which directly impact all of our lives.

In Florida, the rate for all crimes has been steadily climbing since 1989. The Florida Council of 100’s Committee on the Justice System filed a draft report that showed the impact of crime on Florida businesses, which were victims of more than 136,000 reported crimes resulting in $7.5 billion in losses.

There are wide-spread initiatives to increase federal allocations to fight crime, such as the $30 billion Federal anti-crime bill. But, according to Alfred Blumstein, former president of the American Society of Criminology, “Starting in the next year (1995) or beyond, demographics will start to work against us as the number in the high-crime age group increases.” The high-crime age group to which he refers are from 15 to 19 years old.

James Alan Fox, dean of the College of Criminal Justice at Northwestern University, was even more blunt: “To prevent a blood bath in the year 2005, when we will have a flood of 15-year-olds, we have to do something today with the 5-year-olds. But when push comes to shove, prevention programs often fall by the wayside in favor of increased incarceration.”

The problem in Florida is dramatically shown in a report of the Southern Regional Education Board showing Florida as the only state in the Southern Region that is below national average on all ten criteria concerning the status of children.
Unfortunately, our society has become more and more reactive instead of seeking ways to deal with the most basic root cause of crime—poverty. In Dade County alone, almost one-third of our 143 neighborhoods are considered “high poverty” areas. In Florida, 41% of black males between 18 and 32 are under the control of the courts. This is an overwhelming loss to the community.

There are many portraits of poverty—hungry and abused children, homeless families, young people with no hope for a productive future. Unbearable living conditions create enormous emotional and economical pressures that explode in outrageous acts of violence. The recent riots in Los Angeles, and those in Miami in 1980, make it very clear that the problems of the underclass impact all of us.

The costs of poverty are more than monetary. Poverty is the leading cause of shortened life expectancy in America. Poverty costs the society its sense of well-being and its human resources.

The cost of maintaining a state of dependency is astronomical.

The billions spent on national public assistance, paid for by American taxpayers, are almost impossible to comprehend. In Dade County, while the dollar figures are more understandable, they are as alarming.

The 1990 Census reported that there were 341,216 persons, one of each six residents of Dade County, living in poverty. In the once healthy and now poverty-stricken neighborhood of Overtown, the cost to sustain life for a family was $22,348, of which $12,665 was provided by the public sector. Considering that there were 3,439 households in Overtown, that meant that the total cost provided by the public sector to sustain life was $43,554,935.

The costs and the number of persons needing assistance have most certainly risen in the ensuing four years. Dade County’s 1993 expenditures for just two programs—food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—totaled $479,706,672. Almost half a million persons, one-quarter of our county’s population, received AFDC and/or food stamps.

When determining the cost of maintaining persons in a dependent condition, public housing is another important factor. Metro-Dade County’s Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports that the total budgeted amount is approximately $4 billion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Dade County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Services Administration</td>
<td>5,994,925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>490,008,755</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Health Service Facilities</td>
<td>48,268,706</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>198,664,525</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s Medical Services</td>
<td>11,103,990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol, Drugs, Mental Health</td>
<td>46,733,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Insurance Benefits (disabled)</td>
<td>110,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance Benefits (aged)</td>
<td>1,040,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Human Service</td>
<td>4,183,666,982</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Baseline Profile for Neighborhood Transformation, DEVPUN, Inc., November, 1994

Over $4 billion was spent on Human Services in Dade County

Alexander Jennings

Alexander Jennings, winner of the academic award for Independent Studies at the Miami-Dade Community College Kendall campus, started as a homeless veteran. Born and raised in Miami’s poor, predominately black neighborhood of Overtown, Mr. Jennings was a ninth-grade dropout, who joined the military, became a substance abuser, and ended up in the VA hospital with a heart attack. He decided to change his life and from that moment his path led up, out of dependency. He obtained a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, equivalent to a high school diploma, and entered Miami-Dade’s Veterans Upward Bound program. After completing a one-year training course in drug counseling from the University of Miami, Jennings became a permanent employee in their drug counseling program. He is now a social work major at Barry University, is married, and is raising three children.
In 1994, Dade County subtracted one family from their list of families needing Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Annistien Sepulveda, 30, found herself without work or job skills even though she was a graduate of Jose M. Llorente high school in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. Her life consisted of waiting for her assistance check and caring for her three-year-old twins, Yesenia and Tamara. The neighborhood she lived in was dangerous, "...there are a lot of prostitutes and drug dealers." Ms. Sepulveda entered the Medical Assisting Program at Miami-Dade's Medical Center campus and, 15 months later, received a vocational certificate in medical assisting. She enrolled in the Private Industry Council's Project Independence, a program that provides meaningful job skills training to individuals with low incomes. Ms. Sepulveda says her success at Miami-Dade carries a message of hope for single mothers in similar situations.

Crime and educational deficiencies go hand in hand.

Direct correlations can be drawn between levels of education and careers in crime; the national data show that most persons in our prisons have less than a high school education. Consider this: most criminals begin their careers as juveniles, with an average of six juvenile offenses. They may have turned to crime for many reasons, but they have one commonality: they are a tremendous financial drain on the rest of society.

Career criminals in Dade County, profiled in a study by the Program Analysis and Grant Development Division of the Metro-Dade Department of Justice Assistance, impose a shocking aggregate dollar cost on our residents. The study showed continuous costs incurred by 1,800 violent career criminals—whose histories include rearrest, reprobation, and reincarceration—impose costs associated with case processing, screening by the state attorney, arraignment, and any type of pretrial hearing, averaged $141,319 per criminal. According to the study, the total direct cost to the county for this "...reversing the crime cycle..." was $254,374,200.

In Florida alone, which maintains around 44,000 prisoners, the cost is $1 billion over the term of their incarceration. The annual expenditure on prisoners is nearly ten times the cost of incarcerating these predators, and this cost is only a fraction of the economic costs such individuals impose on our communities through the numerous crimes they commit each year.

While the cost of maintaining our criminal justice system should be of great concern, we should be equally disturbed when we examine the lifetime patterns of the career criminals profiled in this study. Their mean age is only 24. On average, they had six prior juvenile convictions, then they committed misdemeanors, felonies, and violent felonies.

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In Florida alone, which maintains around 44,000 prisoners, the cost is $1 billion over the term of their incarceration. The annual expenditure on prisoners is nearly ten
times the expenditure for a full-time student in a community college. These expenditures are having little effect on the rate of recidivism; most released criminals are back in jail within three years.

Considering that the number of new prison admissions in Florida has almost tripled in eight years, rising from approximately 12,500 to 33,000, it is obvious that we are facing the frightening prospect of an ever-increasing burden on society and the loss of important human resources.

**Members of the Information Age workforce need a higher level of skills.**

In the 21st century, the socially deprived, undereducated person will be at an even greater disadvantage. Business and industry leaders are expressing deep concerns about the need for workers with high quality skills at a post-secondary level. Persons with minimal skills, even though they are willing to work, will find there are fewer available jobs.

In the Information Age, the nature of jobs has changed significantly. Information skills are needed as the base for almost all employment. This is a significant change from a time when most jobs in America were based on willingness to work and minimal skills.

Before and just after World War II, 80% of the jobs were for unskilled or semi-skilled workers; businesses were labor intensive; most employment was on farms or in factories and plants such as those of the giant steel and automotive industries. Those percentages have become almost directly reversed. Today, business and industry leaders tell us that only 20% of new jobs are for the unskilled or semi-skilled: 80% will require some post-secondary education.

George A. Baker, III and Lester W. Reed, Jr., authors of "Creating a World-Class Workforce," cut to the heart of the issue: "America's problems can in fact be traced to a prime cause—and a cure exists. The root cause, exacerbated by rapid growth in social and entitlement programs, is the inability of the U.S. economy to expand sufficiently to cover the cost of increased spending. At the core of the economic situation is a large, underprepared work force has no hope of meeting the challenges of the future...Without a restructured educational process to create this workforce, all of our efforts to combat social ills are doomed to be losing battles." Our businesses and industries must have a workforce of the highest quality in order to succeed in the world marketplace. We are already seeing a gross mismatch between the capabilities of individuals attempting to enter the job market and the needs of employers. The gap between the skills needed and those possessed by the workforce continues to grow, seriously handicapping American business and industry.
Floridians are Underskilled for the Information Age.

On a statewide basis, 54% of students entering Florida's community colleges test as academically underprepared. Currently at Miami-Dade Community College, 72% of entering high school graduates, and 43% of those from the top 20% of high school graduates, required remedial work just to be able to do basic entry-level college work.

Importantly, in a study by the College Board, there was a 90% overlap in the skills business and industry wanted in a beginning employee with those that colleges wanted in an entering student.

On a nationally standardized test, 41% of Dade tenth grade students were in the last quartile in reading. In addition, it is clear that the entering immigrant population adds even more underprepared students to Florida's schools.

In 1989, the U.S. Department of Education reported that Florida led the nation in high school dropouts. Young people who drop out of high school before graduation are virtually unemployable in any but the most menial jobs. According to the SERVE Report, "Florida and Georgia, for example, offer lots of jobs through tourism, which provides minimum wage and "working poor" positions for high school dropouts and well-paying jobs for college graduates in business, computer, financial, and professional services."

Higher education leads to higher pay.

The Florida Department of Commerce reported data from 1991-1992 U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Labor statistics, comparing Florida to the other 49 states. In average annual pay, at $21,991 Florida ranked well below the national average of $24,575.

In average hourly earnings in manufacturing, Florida was sixth from the bottom of the scale, at $9.61 per hour.

There is a direct correlation between states with the highest percentage of educational attainment and those with the highest hourly wage, highest personal per capita income, and highest annual salary. When the national data are analyzed for average annual pay, we see that in seven of the top ten states, more than 60% of the wage earners have post-secondary education.

A national study released in July by the U.S. Department of Commerce found that higher earnings are linked to higher levels of education.
Education is the answer.

I believe that children under go a gradual disillusionment. The freshness, the curiosity seen so often in young children, begins to disappear as they learn more of life's realities. By the time they are old enough to enter middle school, many young people—particularly those who are attempting to rise from poverty—have become completely defeated by a system they perceive as uncaring and unsupportive.

They despair of ever finding a way out. They are stuck in the bog of public assistance. Some will struggle in low-paying jobs and accept their fate while trying to maintain a sense of worth and pride. Others will decide to take what they want, regardless of the tenets of law and order. A fortunate few will get the encouragement and support they need to reach their goals.

The cards are stacked against the underprepared.

A person who has dropped out of school, or even one with a high-school diploma, will not be equipped to enter the new workforce. But, community colleges have a record of helping the underprepared to attain success.

Community colleges are the bridge to independence.

Labor Secretary Robert Reich recently said it best, "Community colleges are the unsung heroes of the nation's middle class."³

Community colleges are the primary access for the essential postsecondary education that leads to jobs and self-sufficiency. For substantial numbers of Floridians, community colleges are the bridge to independence. Florida's community colleges have often been acknowledged as among the best in America. For most minorities, these institutions are the only opportunity to gain a post-secondary education and a better future. At Miami-Dade, for instance, we have the most Blacks, Hispanics, low-income, and English-As-a-Second-Language students of any college or university in the country. By the same token, we have been rated as the best at teaching and learning, the most innovative, and the number one community college in America.

As an example of what can be achieved when there is a serious commitment to help all individuals develop fully, Miami-Dade is the pro-

The majority of entering students are underprepared, yet they succeed in Miami-Dade Nursing Programs.

"Community Colleges stand as the institutions with the greatest capability to immediately move significant numbers of Americans from dependent to self-sufficient status."
In 1993, with the help of Miami-Dade's Upward Bound program for veterans, he passed his college entrance exams and, in 1991 he earned his GED. He earned an Associate of Arts degree in social work, received several awards for academic achievement, and became a member of Phi Theta Kappa, a national honor society. He earned a Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree at Barry University in 1993 and he's been accepted at Nova University for graduate study. Today he has a home office equipped with a voice synthesizing computer and works as a computer processor and a behavioral therapy counselor. The community has gained the skills of this man, who otherwise would have been completely dependent on the society for his most basic needs.

The Microcomputer Education for Employment of the Disabled (MEED) program established at Miami-Dade in 1989, is a special and unique training program. The program creates job opportunities for unemployed, severely physically disabled adults through practical training in business PC software. With easy access to a PC, persons with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or upper body disabilities are as competitive in business as any able-bodied person. Between 80% and 90% of MEED students graduate and become Microcomputer Specialists.

MEED has a strong, close partnership with the local business community through its Business Advisory Council. One hundred corporate executives participate in the council and are personally involved with student activities, financial and equipment contributions, field trips, evaluation of performance, internships, mentorships, employment opportunities, and classroom instruction. MEED has long been an exemplary model of partnership among the private sector, public agencies, and a community college. The MEED program at Miami-Dade has produced 120 graduates who have gained the opportunity to obtain satisfying jobs, financial independence, and upward mobility.

Miami-Dade was one of the first in the United States to be designated as a serviceman's opportunity college by the Defense Department and the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. In the mid-'70s, through Project AHEAD (Army Help for Education and Development), service personnel could pursue a continuous education while they were on duty at various locations.

By the end of the 1993 fiscal year, the Veterans' Upward Bound program at the Kendall Campus had served 480 veterans through its federal grant. Program counselors also worked with hundreds of local veterans, a significant number of whom were living on the streets, homeless—whether eligible for the program or not—on federal, state, and local sources of aid for education and job training.

Using the education they have received at Miami-Dade, thousands of citizens serve the community in very special ways. There are an abundance of persons who are gaining success and self-sufficiency every day.
Another group deserves special mention: the single parents who struggle to attain an education, sometimes against overwhelming odds. About 28% of Florida's children are raised by more than 700,000 single parents, a rate surpassed by only five other states. Florida's community colleges have provided childcare and other supportive programs to assist single parents, thus moving entire families to self-sufficiency. Poverty-stricken single parents have an enormous task in simply providing sustenance for their children. Imagine the near impossibility of accessing a post-secondary education under those circumstances. Those who try and, to an even deeper extent, those who succeed, are truly American heroes and heroines.

Florida has abandoned its commitment to the community colleges.

From 1988 to 1993, Florida's general revenue and community colleges' enrollment increased by about the same percentage. But the state appropriation to education was much lower, and the community colleges' portion was minuscule. When the figures are corrected for inflation, state revenue was still up, but the community colleges' appropriation was down by more than 15%. This spread is even more startling when viewed on a per-student basis. When adjusted for inflation the decrease in the appropriation per student was 38%.

Florida's lottery funds were intended for quality enhancement but, in fact, they have been used to supplant general revenue. Even when these funds are added back into the mix, there is an appropriation decrease of 4.4% per student, which is a decrease of 22.6% when corrected for inflation.

When the education picture is looked at as a whole, it becomes obvious that Florida has not given priority to education, and that community colleges have fared most poorly of all.

In 1989, Delores Bloom-Fisher, a single parent of two boys, started working at Mercy Hospital as a salad server in the food service department. Her supervisors encouraged her to enroll in the Dietetic Technology Program at Miami-Dade. Although it meant depending on public transportation, Delores traveled every day, weekends included, from Opa-Locka to work a full-time schedule at Mercy Hospital near downtown Miami, and arranged a class schedule which included evening courses. She also made time for her sons and often they did their homework together. She received her associate's degree and is now manager of purchasing and hot food production at the hospital. She is working toward a bachelor's degree.

1987-88 to 1992-1993, Florida Community College appropriations have decreased steadily.
Community colleges are ideally equipped to carry out this mission: they believe in the value of every individual; they celebrate the important victories—when men and women, who have slipped through the cracks of the system, gain the skills to be self-dependent; they are the only institutions prepared for the awesome task of helping the underprepared and disenfranchise to succeed...

Community colleges are a bargain.

Community colleges have been effectively serving their towns and cities by enabling citizens to become productive and independent. Why then, is financial support for community colleges decreasing to the point of major crisis?

The cost of education, when compared to the cost of maintaining persons in dependency, is, as the old saying goes, cheap at twice the price. Community college expenditures in 1992-93 were $3,361.18 for the equivalent of each full time student. In 1992-93, Florida spent approximately $26,000 for each prisoner incarcerated in our prisons. When we think in wider terms, of the debilitation of our social health through rising crime and increased dependence on the system, it is clear that major changes must be made in our list of priorities. If post-secondary education carries such positive implications, does it not make sense to support the very colleges that have been engaged in this war against poverty since their inception?

The State of Florida is Starving the Solution.

There are three salient points to consider: The growth of the underclass is destructive to the health of our society; in a world economy, America needs a quality workforce with high skills; the cost of maintaining an underclass in dependency is escalating and intolerable.

Community colleges can provide a way out of hopelessness, and a road to self-sufficiency. It would be far better to spend our resources on education than to permit people to fall into permanent dependency, to be supported for their lifetimes. Community colleges are essential to our economic future, they are productive, they are efficient—but—they are undervalued, underappreciated, and underfunded.

For many years, financial support for Florida’s community colleges has been steadily declining. On top of gradually declining appropriations, colleges have been faced with major cuts in support over the past five years. At the same time, the cost of maintaining growing numbers of dependent individuals has been steadily increasing. As district president of Miami-Dade Community College, I have seen ample, incontrovertible evidence of our ability to assist men and women in moving from dependency to self-sufficiency through our educational programs. The lack of support has placed the community colleges on the very edge of losing the ability to successfully carry out their mission.

I am deeply concerned about the many issues that impact our society’s well-being, but there is one underlying issue we tend to ignore—the expense of staying on the current path. If the...
costs of crime and welfare programs continue to increase, and most predictions offer no indication otherwise, we will have to reduce funding for constructive assistance and the quality of life will continue to decline. I believe we could soon be saying the early '90s really were "the good old days."

“Florida is on the verge of irretrievably damaging the community colleges' capacity to be a constructive resource for the people of our state.”

A Call to Action for the 1995 Florida Legislature

None of Florida's public educational institutions are well-funded, but the underfunding of community colleges has reached a critical circumstance. If the colleges were hospital patients, they would be in intensive care. The symptoms are ominous—a rapid increase in sections taught by part-time faculty; a decrease in support personnel; inadequate funds to stay current with technical equipment and library materials; and non-competitive salaries.

What has happened is the equivalent of starving a promising solution to the most serious problems facing our state. The passage of Proposition 2 severely restricts spending by the 1995 legislature. Nevertheless, it is imperative that the legislature give a priority to beginning the process of helping the recovery of the community colleges. Our state cannot afford the long-term cost of inaction—in lost human resources, a less-prepared work force, and increased costs to support more dependent individuals.

It is time to invest in Florida's future by reinvesting in Florida's Community Colleges.
References:

3. Farrell, John S.; *Career Criminals—The Need to Incapacitate the Violent Repeat Offender*; Metro-Dade Department of Justice Assistance, Program Analysis and Grant Development Division; 1994.

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