

Community centers may help reduce crime rate

HOUSTON (AP) — State Sen. Chet Brooks said Monday, replacing reform schools with community centers will help reduce crime and improve the rehabilitation of juveniles.

The chairman of the Texas House-Senate Committee on Prison Reform made his remarks while commending an order by U. S. District Court Judge William Wayne Justice of Tyler that Texas

dismantle its larger reform schools. Brooks said that under current operations of the Texas Youth Council that most juveniles never get to the reform schools until it is too late for rehabilitation.

He said that under the community center system called for by Justice's order, first offenders in some states are treated like outpatients at a hospital. In such cases, Brooks said, the

juveniles live at home while taking part in rehabilitative programs and receiving counseling, tests, and guidance. Brooks said he was expressing only his views but that he believes

the first four community centers should be near the state's four largest metropolitan areas with others to be added later to facilitate other areas. He said the legislature would have to solve the financing problem.

Judge Briss Cole, a former state senator, said he agrees 100 per cent with Justice.

"I think Gatesville and Mountainview should be closed," Cole said. "There shouldn't be any problems relocating the kids, especially from Mountainview, where I think they only have 45 or 50 youngsters there now."

"There have been a lot of problems at Gatesville," he said. "The state will need to do a lot of planning for new programs in the next few years."

Cole said money now being spent on the reform schools should go a long way toward funding more local programs but added there may well be a need for additional funds.

Brooks said Justice's ruling points more to the kind of facility than to the number of juveniles housed at each facility. The central issue behind the idea of breaking up the reform schools, he added, is the program of rehabilitation, not the number of juveniles at any one place.

The Pasadena Democrat said Dr. George Beto, former director of the Texas Department of Corrections, once testified that 43 per cent of the adults held by the prison system could be rehabilitated more effectively at community centers than at the department's 14 units.

Brooks said there still will be a need for some sort of a facility for incorrigible juveniles in that such offenders should not be permitted to associate with youngsters with records of only one or a few mistakes.

The senator said the community center concept also lends itself to community involvement in juvenile rehabilitation.

He said involvement by public schools, private physicians, and representatives of social agencies would be more practicable at the community level.

Two Harris County juvenile judges also commended Justice's ruling.

"Nobody's surprised, it's been coming a while," said Judge W. H. Miller. "Least of all surprised should be the Texas Youth Council. However, there will always be a need for some sort of maximum security facility for the real problem cases."

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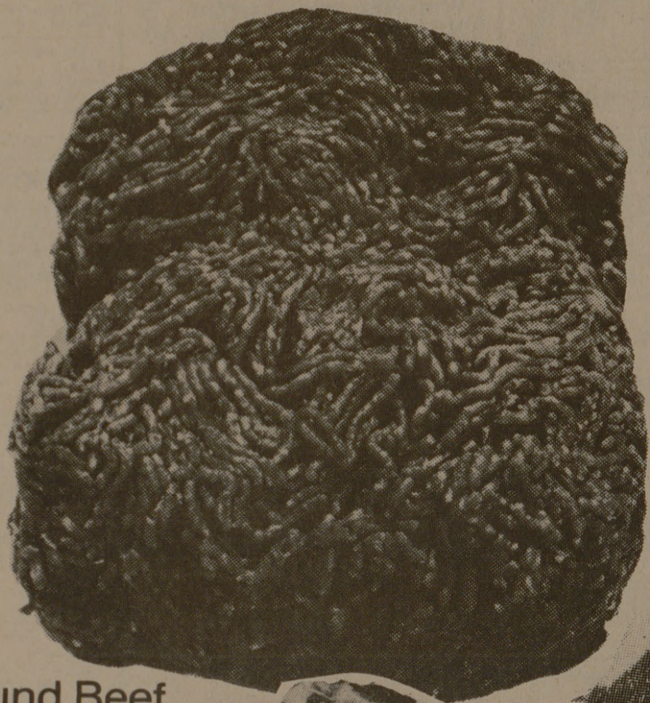
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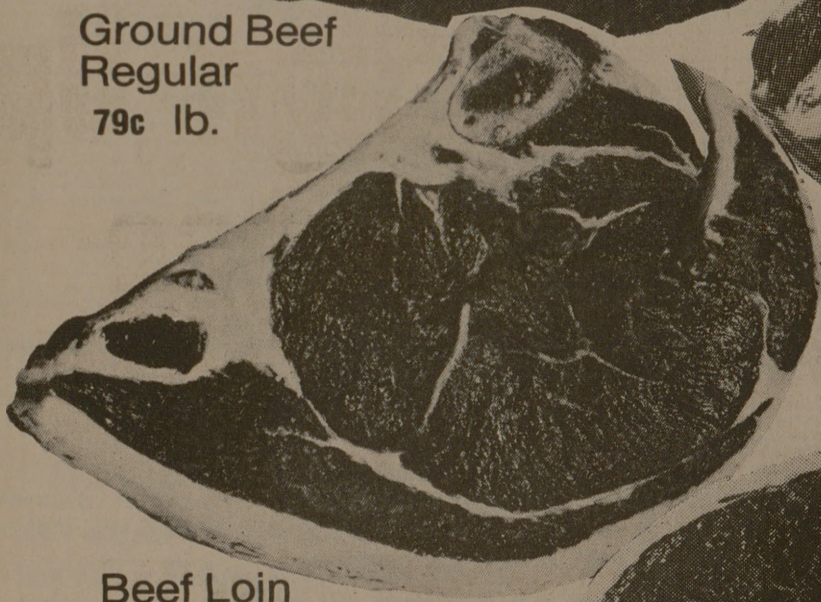
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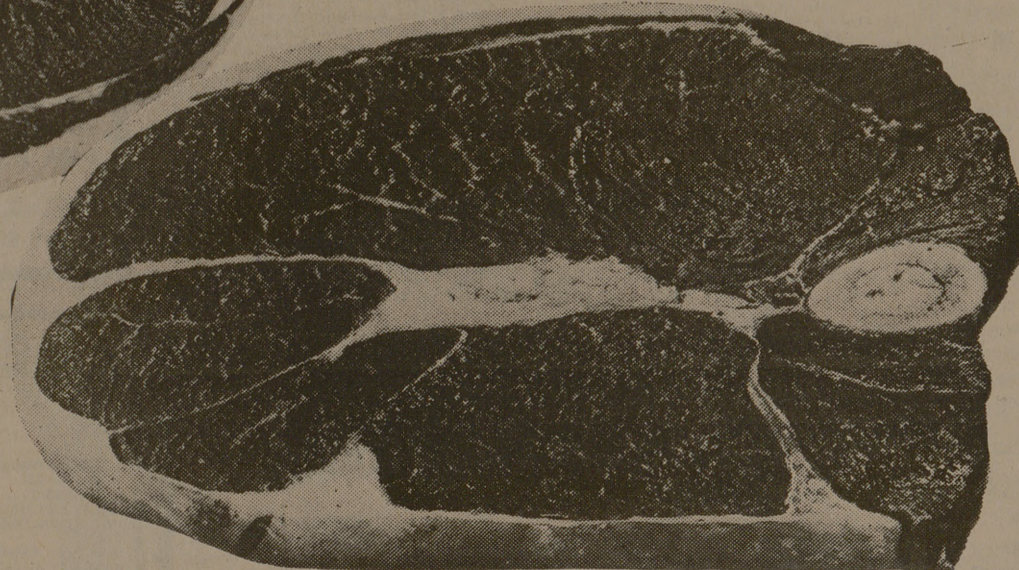
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