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## **Congressman Bobby Scott Hosts "Teen Summit On Violence" In An Effort to Promote The Youth Promise Act**

By US House of Representatives  
Published on 03/28/2008

In an effort to educate our communities and promote H.R. 3846, The Youth PROMISE Act, Virginia Congressman Bobby Scott hosted the "Teen Summit On Violence" at I.C. Norcom High School in Portsmouth, Virginia this past week. The summit was free and open to the public.

The community response was very favorable as parents, grandparents, students, community leaders, faith-based organizational leaders, educators, social service agency leaders, government officials, juvenile justice officials, youth advocacy groups, law enforcement, the superintendent of schools, and the media gathered to have an honest, open, and candid conversation about the present state of the youth within our communities and what can be done to improve the overall quality of life for them.

Congressman Scott shared that, "...a large percentage of this country's minority children are on what the Children's Defense Fund refers to as a "cradle to prison pipeline" rather than a "cradle to college pipeline."

Read more about The Children's Defense Fund report at:

[http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=c2pp\\_report2007](http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=c2pp_report2007)

In an October 16, 2007 press release, it was announced that Congressman Scott introduced the Youth PROMISE Act to "provide resources to communities to engage in comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies to decrease juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang and crime activity."

He went on to say that,

*"the Youth Promise Act could be a critical component to reducing crime across the United States. For years, we have been codifying slogan and soundbites that do nothing to reduce crime. As a result of these policies, the average incarceration rate in the United States is far above the incarceration rates in other countries and incarceration costs have risen to \$65 billion per year. This legislation implements the recommendations of researchers, practitioners, analysts, and law enforcement officials from across the political spectrum concerning evidence- and research-based strategies to reduce gang violence and youth crime."*

Presenters during the summit included Dr. Dewey Cornell, clinical psychologist and professor, Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and Director of the UVA Youth Violence Project; and the Honorable Jerrauld Jones, former Director of the Virginia Department Juvenile Justice and current Chief Judge, Norfolk Juvenile and Domestic Relations District

Court, 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of Virginia; and Ms. Braithwaite of Portsmouth's Community Service Board. There were also two student panelists who are presently sophomores at I.C. Norcom, Paneisha Eure and Deonna Durand.

Honorable Judge Jones shared sobering accounts of his experiences regarding our children by the time they have reached his courts. He emphasized the enormous need for mentoring within the community as an effective and simple intervention for positively impacting the lives of young people and holding them not only responsible, but accountable as well. He also listed a gang that he was part of as a child, The Boy Scouts.

Judge Jones identified that one of the common factors that were observed regarding young juvenile delinquents were their deficient reading and overall academic and social skills. He emphasized the need for intensive supports to address these specific areas.

He also shared that, while in recent years, the trend has been to "adultify" the juvenile courts, the primary purpose of juvenile justice is to rehabilitate young people, not "criminalize" them, and that the battle for our young people must be fought and won within the families, churches, and schools of our communities.

He went on to share a fact that was shocking to many when he stated that one of the factors utilized by those that develop projections for building new jails is the number of students that are reading by the time that they reach third grade. He went on to share that students that are reading by the third grade tend to be less involved in criminal activities. Congressman Scott echoed this sentiment when he shared that "up until the third grade, our children learn to read, after the third grade, they must read to learn."

Dr. Dewey Cornell provided an extremely insightful and informative presentation regarding the history, causes, characteristics, and trends regarding gang violence. He identified gangs as "family substitutes" that provide the love that many young people are not receiving from any other sources within the community.

Dr. Cornell went on to share that young people often provide the warning signs that they are going to commit a violent act as he discussed the need for the proper use of threat assessments as a preventative tool when dealing with potentially violent youth. He also stated that adults must remember to take each threat seriously. As an example of this, he shared that Cho, the Virginia Tech shooter, wrote of his intentions to carry out another "Columbine" in the eighth grade, but no one listened.

As he continued with his presentation, Dr. Cornell highlighted three facts regarding gangs within communities, which are gangs are a recurrent problem, beware of simple solutions, and prevention works.

He also outlined the six responses that communities have to dealing with gangs, which include; denial, minimizing, weak comparisons, panic, overreacting, and prevention.

Dr. Cornell went on to emphasize the hope that communities would arrive at the prevention stage as quickly as possible based on the research-based evidence that gang prevention efforts do work. These interventions include behavioral, cognitive, and social skill programs that meet the needs of students and serve as a viable alternative to the attractiveness of gang life.

Another area that Dr. Cornell addressed involved the concept of "snitching" among young people and how often times students do not warn others of violent acts committed by fellow students for fear of being labeled a "snitch". In an effort to combat this mentality, he advocates for the educating of students in order to help them determine the difference between "snitching" for personal gain versus "snitching" in an effort to help others. The overall goal is to encourage students to proactively come forward in order to help their peers that may be thinking about, talking about or may actually carry out a violent act.

Ms. Braithwaite, the final adult panelist, shared that the greatest challenges for our young people exists within the middle school ages of ten-fifteen. She highlighted criminal statistics involving this age group that involved all types of crimes ranging from disorderly conduct to drug and weapons possession. Ms. Braithwaite also shared the alarming statistics regarding the increase in the suicide rate among young people of color and the desperation that accompanies that state of mind.

The student panelists shared enlightening and candid perspectives as well. Paneisha Eure shared how her mother had told her "you should feel safe in three places if you do not feel safe anywhere else, and those places are home, school, and church." She went on to share how she was bullied while at school without any intervention by an adult and ended up having to handle the matter herself when administrators repeatedly ignored her requests for help.

Deonna Durand, the second student panelist, echoed many of her peer's sentiments and added that she wished adults would be more "proactive instead of reactive" to the concerns that are going on in the schools with students.

At the conclusion of the Teen Summit, it was obvious that education, empowerment, and encouragement had taken place, and that many of those that attended would be supporting H.R. 3846, The Youth Promise Act.

For more information about The Youth Promise Act, please visit Congressman Scott's website at: [http://www.house.gov/scott/hotissues\\_youthpromiseact.shtml](http://www.house.gov/scott/hotissues_youthpromiseact.shtml). Questions and endorsements regarding this act can be directed to Ilana Brunner in Congressman Scott's office at 202-225-8351 or [Ilana.Brunner@mail.house.gov](mailto:Ilana.Brunner@mail.house.gov).

<http://ednews.org/articles/24270/1/Congressman-Bobby-Scott-Hosts-Teen-Summit-On-Violence--In-An-Effort-to-Promote-The-Youth-Promise-Act/Page1.html>