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March 31, 2008

The Honorable Robert C. (Bobby) Scott
United States House of Representatives
2600 Washington Ave. Suite 1010
Newport News, VA 23607

Dear Mr. Scott:

The Hampton Juvenile Detention Alternatives Collaborative is a broad based coalition of juvenile justice and human services professionals from this community. Our mission is to ensure that public safety is enhanced by detaining the most dangerous youth in secure confinement, while assigning other less threatening youth to community based service programs. Under the able leadership of our Juvenile Court judges we have been very successful in our efforts.

We could not have succeeded, however, without a broad array of detention alternatives which allowed us to place each youth in a service tailored to his or her particular situation. To continue and enhance this effort, we the undersigned organizations express our strong support for the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act), H.R. 3846. (It should be noted that for ethical reasons, the judges of the Hampton Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court took no part in the discussion leading to this letter of support and have expressed no opinions regarding the subject.)

This bill is a crime prevention and intervention bill, which gets at the root causes of youth and gang violence before youth get into trouble. Rather than creating additional and duplicative punitive approaches, that do very little to prevent youth from engaging in delinquent activity, the Youth PROMISE Act builds upon evidence-based and promising practices proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency.

The Youth PROMISE Act is a unique and forward thinking bill containing strategies that respond directly to the needs of our community. The bill provides for:

1. **Planning grants to assess the needs of each community.** The bill provides for a one year planning grant for each community facing an increase risk of crime and gang activity in order to enable them to begin to address unmet needs and prevent crime from occurring.
2. **The formation of local community committees – PROMISE Coordinating Councils – to come up with a solution specifically tailored for that community.** Under the Youth PROMISE Act, communities facing the greatest youth gang, delinquency and crime challenges will come together – via the PROMISE Coordinating Council – that brings together law enforcement, community-based organizations, schools, faith organizations, health, social services, and mental health providers – to

Virginia Supports the Youth PROMISE Act (H.R. 3846)

develop and implement a comprehensive local plan to support young people and their families and make our communities safer, reduce victimization, and help at-risk young people to lead law-abiding and healthy lives, free from gangs, delinquency and/or criminal involvement.

3. **The use of evidence-based practices and programs for prevention and intervention.** The Youth PROMISE Act builds upon the broad array of evidence-based strategies that are proven effective to reduce and prevent youth violence and delinquency. Evidence-based practices are rooted in science, they are replicable, and their efficacy has been proven. In addition, the bill requires that thorough assessment and evaluation measures be implemented to ensure that resources are directed toward communities faced with the highest levels of crime and gang activity.
4. **Cost savings related to prevention and intervention practices.** The Youth PROMISE Act provides for thorough evaluation, including analyses of the cost-savings to society yielded by investing in prevention and intervention rather than in more costly and ineffective prosecution and incarceration. Under the Youth PROMISE Act, savings from investments in prevention and intervention programs such as; in early childhood education, after-school, mentoring, and other programs, will be reinvested in prevention and intervention efforts funded under the Act.
5. **Resources for law enforcement.** The Youth PROMISE Act also provides for the hiring and training of Youth Oriented Policing (YOPS) officers to prevent and address juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity in a manner that is responsive to the research on juveniles and adolescent brain development. Additionally, the Act includes support for youth victim and witness protection programs, which are critical to deter crime, as well as extended and increased authorizations for the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant program to support juvenile justice systems.

In short, the approach of the Youth PROMISE Act makes sense, comports with the research on adolescent brain development and crime and violence prevention and intervention, and will yield overall savings to the community. We applaud your efforts to draft this legislation and offer our support.

Thank you for your consideration.

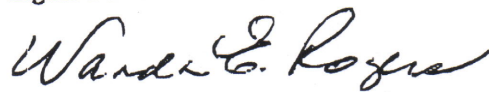
Sincerely,

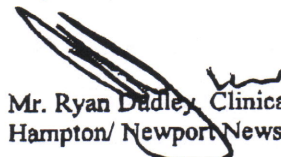

John C. Matish, JDAI Coordinator
City of Hampton

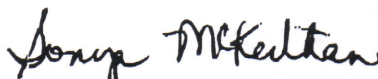

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