



**Testimony by Paul L. Seave
Before the
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
House Committee on Judiciary
Hearing on:
"Gang Crime Prevention and the Need to Foster Innovative Solutions
At the Federal Level"
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Introduction

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Seave, and I am California's Director of Gang and Youth Violence Policy, a position to which I was recently appointed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. I am here to testify in strong support of H.R. 3547 – the Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression Act, sponsored by Congressman Adam Schiff and Congresswoman Mary Bono.

My support for H.R. 3547 derives directly from California's long and tragic experience with street gangs. Before I proceed, however, let me explain, by way of background, that before assuming my current position I served as a federal prosecutor in CA for fifteen years – the last four as United States Attorney in Sacramento. I spent the next five years as Director of the CA Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center, where my staff of 40 promoted prevention and intervention strategies in a number of areas, including gang and youth violence.

California's Experience

Now: If there is one lesson that law enforcement in California has learned after decades of gang violence, concentrated suppression efforts, and more than 10,000 gang-related homicides in the past twenty years, it is that "We can't arrest our way out of the problem." - So says virtually every law enforcement leader in California.

This does not mean that law enforcement should not pursue those who commit violence, or that "smart" suppression efforts aren't necessary to interrupt the cycle of retaliatory violence that attends gang disputes. Instead, what it does mean is that suppression should be viewed as both a short-term fix to gang violence and the critical first step to a long-term solution. And that solution requires prevention and intervention activities – hopefully those that have been proven effective – implemented in a sustained and robust fashion according to a comprehensive strategic plan formulated by many sectors in the community. A strategy that overlooks any of these components – suppression, prevention, or intervention – will inevitably allow the conditions that gave rise to the violence, and the violence itself, to re-emerge.

Need for Federal Role

The primary responsibility for addressing gang violence belongs to local communities with the support of state government. But the scope, persistence, and effects of gang violence leave no doubt that federal help and leadership are now needed if we are to bring about a long-term reduction in gangs and gang violence.

H.R. 3547 delivers that help and leadership, hitting all the marks. For example, federal enforcement efforts are sometimes needed to supplement those of local and state agencies when street gangs are particularly dangerous or violent. This bill authorizes federal agencies to prosecute those gangs for the types of crimes that they commit – particularly, for acts of violence and for retaliation against witnesses.

Prevention and intervention must receive **equal** attention and again this bill does just that. The provisions in Title III that allow designation of High Intensity Gang Activity

Areas (HIGAA) promote the most effective approach to reducing gang violence in the long-term – 1) targeting the areas most afflicted by gang crime; 2) requiring each HIGAA to create a multi-disciplinary working group of law enforcement, educators, faith leaders, community leaders, and service providers; 3) giving preference for funding to areas that have comprehensive strategies; 4) giving 50% of the funds to enforcement and 50% to intervention and prevention; and 5) creating a National Gang Research, Evaluation, and Policy Institute, an absolutely essential organization that is best situated at the federal level.

Conclusion

California has learned – the hard way – that suppression is a critically important part of the answer, but not the complete answer, to reducing gang violence; that prevention and intervention are absolutely essential to any long-term strategy to reduce gang violence; and that federal assistance and leadership – across all three dimensions – are necessary. H.R. 3547 promises to deliver the needed help. I would ask that the House move quickly to address the national problem of gang violence, just as the Senate recently passed S. 456, a bill sponsored by Senators Dianne Feinstein and Orrin Hatch that takes a similar approach to reducing gang violence.