



**Hearing Statement of the Honorable John Conyers, Jr. for the Hearing on  
"Addressing Gangs: What's Effective? What's Not?" Before the  
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security Tuesday, June  
10, 2008, at 1:00 p.m. 2237 Rayburn House Office Building**

Today, the Subcommittee is holding the third hearing this Congress on what approaches work to stop gang crime.

Some think that the most effective approach is to enact more laws that would result in more people being locked up. Others support programs that help prevent young people from getting involved with gangs in the first place.

I hope that today's witnesses will address both approaches and help guide us in determining what will best stem the tide of gangs. To that end, I have three suggestions.

First, I believe it is particularly important that we address the fundamental reason why young people are drawn to gangs. We need to understand why our youth often feel more of an allegiance to their gang than they do to their own families.

Second, we must not ignore how communities are impacted by gang crime. Whether you live in urban or rural America, you have the right to feel safe from violence in your home.

However, feeling safe in your home should not mean locking up every young person and throwing away the key. We need to find a balance that aims for the best result for our young people as well as for the communities where they live.

As Professor Olgetree's recent study points out, we spend anywhere from \$35,000 to \$70,000 a year to incarcerate a juvenile in this country. A recent Pew Foundation study points out that 1 in every 100 Americans are now behind bars, with 1 in every 9 young black males behind bars.

Regardless of whether your motivation is to save money or to save lives, we should reflect upon whether our resources are being used wisely by sending so many people to prison.

And, third, while it is critical to address gang crime, we must do so in a way that will not sacrifice basic principles of fairness and justice. We must deal with gangs in a way that does not lead to racial or age-related profiling, with disproportionate numbers of young Americans being unnecessarily funneled through the criminal justice system based on their race or ethnicity, or on their youth.

More broadly, we should not be so quick to throw away our young people. The Supreme Court has acknowledged that there are fundamental differences between adults and adolescents that impact the way a young person thinks and reasons. We should also acknowledge these differences as we consider how to deal with gangs.

With that said, I'd like to thank each of the witnesses for agreeing to appear before us today. I look forward to hearing your testimony and working with you to develop positive solutions to our gang problems.