

December 13, 2007

**Re: Letter of Support for the Youth PROMISE Act, H.R. 3846**

Dear Representative:

The Campaign for Youth Justice offers its strong endorsement of the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act), H.R. 3846, and urges you to cosponsor this important legislation.

The Campaign for Youth Justice is a national campaign dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating children under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice. Far too many of our youth, parents, families and communities have experienced the tragedy of losing youth in the criminal justice system, and we applaud efforts to prevent and intervene in gang violence, crime and delinquency, and to keep young people out of the juvenile and criminal justice systems and in safe, nurturing environments where they can grow and thrive.

The Youth PROMISE Act bill provides support to communities facing the greatest youth gang, crime and delinquency challenges. Under the Act, local communities form PROMISE councils, including representatives from schools, social services, health and mental health providers, community-based and faith-based organizations, court services and law enforcement. Each council assesses the community's needs and strengths, evaluates current funding priorities – including local jail and prison expenditures – and then develops a comprehensive plan for implementing evidence-based and promising prevention and intervention strategies. These strategies will be targeted at young people who are at-risk of becoming involved, or involved in, gangs or the criminal justice system to redirect them toward productive and law-abiding alternatives. The bill also provides for Youth Oriented Policing (“YOPS”), which includes training for police officers in issues of adolescent development and juvenile specific issues, as well as a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation. The significant cost savings the Youth PROMISE Act will generate (through reduced crime and prison rates) will be reinvested in Youth PROMISE programs.

Now more than ever, we need the long-term juvenile and criminal justice policy solutions offered in the Youth PROMISE Act. The Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), highlighted this urgency last week when it released statistics showing that at the end of 2006, more than 2.25 million persons were incarcerated in US prisons and jails, an all-time high. These statistics also highlighted the sharp racial disparities in US incarceration rates, with black men incarcerated at a rate 6.2 times higher than white men.

The Campaign for Youth Justice laments these trends, and strongly opposes proposed gang legislation that will lead to the unwarranted federal prosecution of more youth – especially poor

youth and youth of color – and result in an increased number of youth incarcerated in adult jails and prisons.<sup>1</sup> Congressional legislation implicating youth in the juvenile justice system should reflect research from experts in the field, including the Center for Disease Control, which recently reported that youth are 34% more likely to reoffend when transferred to the adult court than youth in the juvenile justice system, and the prosecution of youth in the adult system yields violent outcomes, including: (1) an increase in pretrial violence, (2) victimization of juveniles in adult facilities, and (3) elevated suicide rates (up to 36%) for juveniles incarcerated in adult facilities.<sup>2</sup> Legislation that will result in and exacerbate these misguided practices has no place in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

It is time for long-term policy solutions that will increase public safety and stem the tide of destruction and waste (both in terms of dollars and lives) caused by our current criminal justice policies. The Youth PROMISE Act offers such a solution. This legislation makes sense, comports with the research on prevention, intervention and adolescent brain development, and will yield overall savings to the community in both financial and life quality measures.

The Campaign for Youth Justice is proud to support the Youth PROMISE Act, and urges you to do the same. Please feel free to contact me or Carol Chodroff, our Juvenile Justice Legislative Consultant, at (415) 730-5882 or [cchodroff@juvjustice.net](mailto:cchodroff@juvjustice.net). To co-sponsor this legislation, please contact Erin Davies at (202) 225-8351 or [Erin.Davies@mail.house.gov](mailto:Erin.Davies@mail.house.gov).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Liz Ryan

President and Executive Director

cc: Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Honorable Lamar S. Smith, Ranking Member, House Judiciary Committee

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<sup>1</sup> For a full report on the dangers of incarcerating juveniles in adult jails and prisons, please visit our website: [http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/national\\_reports.html](http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/national_reports.html)

<sup>2</sup> See CDC Task Force *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report – Reports and Recommendations*. The full report is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/>