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## **The Youth PROMISE Act: A brief overview**

The Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act or the Youth PROMISE Act is a congressional bill meant to curb youth violence, gang crime, and juvenile incarceration by promoting a more holistic form of juvenile justice that targets high-risk youth and tries to offer real alternatives to incarceration. Introduced by Virginia Congressman Bobby Scott, the bill would try to integrate “evidence-based/promising programs” (like quality early childhood education, intervention treatment facilities, mentoring and after school programs, etc.) and combine them with the “coordinated efforts of stakeholders in the juvenile justice system in a local community...to ensure that youth lead productive, safe, healthy, gang-free, and law-abiding lives.”<sup>i</sup>

Ultimately, the goal would be to empower local stakeholders and make million-dollar investments in programs that encourage development, prevention, and treatment rather than incarceration. The major goals of the Youth Promise Act would be to lower expenditures, reduce recidivism, and target marginalized adolescents and provide them with real alternatives to incarceration.

More specifically, the Promise Act specifically intends to “amend the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 to establish a PROMISE Advisory Panel to assist the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in: (1) assessing and developing standards and evidence-based practices to prevent juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity; and (2) collecting data in designated geographic areas to assess the needs and existing resources for juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity prevention and intervention.”<sup>ii</sup>

The bill then authorizes an OJJDP administrator to award grants to local and tribal governments to implement “Promise Plans “after assessing evidence about what practices work best to prevent juvenile crime and where potential adolescent criminal activity is most rampant.

Promise plans are then developed by a local Promise Coordinating Councils that are composed of a variety of community stakeholders including people from local educational, health, and housing agencies, law enforcement and juvenile courts, and faith-based organizations and nonprofits. Ultimately, the most important element “of the coordinated strategy that will be used by the Promise Coordinating Council” is that “they provide at-risk youth with evidence-based and promising practices related to juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity prevention and intervention.”<sup>iii</sup>

Figuring out what programs, services, or treatments to implement (and how to implement them) in the aforementioned communities requires rigorous academic assessments. To help encourage that the local grants are using best practices, the bill also establishes a National Research Center for Proven Juvenile

Justice Practices—which will bring academics and local universities to disseminate cutting-edge research to Promise Coordinating Councils to provide consultation on neighborhood composition, making assessments, and implementing best practices. Grant programs will also be made available to local universities to “serve as regional research partners with Promise Coordinating Councils.”<sup>iv</sup>

### **Key components of the Youth Promise Act**

#### ***Philosophical girding:***

1. Gang violence imposes economic, social, and human costs.
2. Costs are burdensome.
3. Targeted intervention reduces costs.
4. Punitive measures increase risks.

#### ***Data-driven policy:***

1. Calls for the use of a wide range of evidence-based and promising practices integrated into a youth-oriented community system of care which can reduce violence, delinquency, reliance on the criminal justice system, as well as public and victim assistance.
2. Specifies greater involvement in prevention and intervention programs for youth such as early childhood programs, comprehensive evidence-based school and aftercare programs, mental health treatment, job training, and alternatives to incarceration.
3. Relies on the model of evidence-based practices in reducing delinquency and costs.

#### ***Upholds devolution and federalism:***

1. Emphasizes coordinating efforts of stakeholders in the community (similar to efforts already underway in Boston, Chicago, Richmond, and Los Angeles).

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<sup>i</sup> H.R. 2721 Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act: Congressional Research Service Summary, retrieved from <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h112-2721>

<sup>ii</sup> United States Cong. 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, *H.R. 2721, Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act* [introduced in the U.S. House 1 August 2011]. GPO Access. Web. 25 February 2012. <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c112:./temp/~c112t0P4QZ>>

<sup>iii</sup> United States Cong. 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, *H.R. 2721, Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act* [introduced in the U.S. House 1 August 2011]. GPO Access. Web. 25 February 2012. <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c112:./temp/~c112t0P4QZ>>

<sup>iv</sup> United States Cong. 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, *H.R. 2721, Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act* [introduced in the U.S. House 1 August 2011]. GPO Access. Web. 25 February 2012. <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c112:./temp/~c112t0P4QZ>>