

PEACE IN THE HOOD



Peace, Justice & Empowerment

January 8, 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

Peace In The Hood of Ohio, Inc., a 501 c (3) organization dedicated to peace, justice and empowerments wishes to express our support for the Youth Prison Reduction Through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act) and urge you to co sponsor and support this much needed legislation. Peace In The Hood began as a subsidiary of A Coalition for A Better Life in 1993 and been a leader in addressing youth gang crime, violence prevention and intervention in this country. As one of the founding members of the National Council for Urban (Gang) Peace, Justice and Empowerment, we have been in trenches with youth and families for over 30 years, with well documented results. A Coalition for A Better Life (Peace In The Hood) helped to broker gang truces and cease fires across the country in the early 1990's and has provided culturally specific programming dedicated to addressing the root causes and below the root causes of youth violence with well documented results. We have continued providing programming and services designed to empower communities and youth to address the challenges confronting urban environments today.

Youth Violence is now a public health concern. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the cost of youth violence to society is over \$158 billion dollars per year. Incarceration costs are also skyrocketing, with a cost of over \$24,000 per inmate (*Ohio Department of Corrections*). Law enforcement alone cannot stem the tide of youth gang violence. Suppression has proven ineffective in reducing recidivism. Without addressing the below the root causes of youth gang violence, the behavior returns.

The Youth PROMISE Act is a unique bill in that it contains a balance of strategies to combat youth violence and dismantle the cradle to prison pipeline that has affected so many youth of color. This act puts control of addressing the needs of each community where it belongs-in the hands of community councils who are the best judge of what individual areas need. Specifically, the act provides:

- 1. Planning grants to assess the needs of each community.** There is no one solution or groups of services that address the needs of all areas of the country. When human beings are involved; one size does not fit all. Solutions must address the strengths and needs of the individual communities.

- 2. The formation of local community committees-PROMISE Coordinating Councils-to come up with a solution specifically tailored for that community**
These community councils would be composed of the leadership of all in the community who are seeking solutions and would include grassroots leadership from traditional and non traditional organizations, indigenous street organizations and formations and all who can provide the services most needed in the individual community.
- 3. The use of evidence-based practices and programs for prevention and intervention.** The Youth Promise Act builds on strategies that have been proven to work to reduce and prevent youth violence and delinquency. These strategies are well documented, as are their success rates. Evidenced based programs have reproducible results.
- 4. Cost savings related to prevention and intervention practices.** The Youth PROMISE Act provides for continual 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. Savings would then be reinvested in prevention and intervention programs.
- 5. Resources for law-enforcement.**
Law enforcement is not excluded and this act calls for the hiring and training of officers in youth violence prevention and intervention and street gang activity in a manner that reflects the research on adolescent brain development and scientific research on juveniles. The grant also supports witness and victim witness protection programs as well as supporting Juvenile Accountability Block Grants to support Juvenile Justice Systems.

The Youth PROMISE Act makes sense to us, as veterans and leaders of the urban peace and justice movement. For years, evidence based prevention and intervention programs that address the root and below the root causes of youth gang violence have been ignored in funding and policy discussions. It is time that we as adults do what we have been asking the youth to do-come to the table as equal partners to seek solutions in a spirit of mutual consideration of ideas for implementation. Unlike in recent years, we need to see the allocation of resources distributed equally. So often, the programs that are actually on the ground doing the work are marginalized or completely ignored. It takes the leadership of traditional and nontraditional organizations, faith and community based organizations, indigenous street organizations and formations, the judicial system and law enforcement to join together in a fair and equitable manner to address the needs of our youth. This generation is only lost if we as adults let it be lost. Solutions take equitable and fair funding and this act puts the dollars where they are most needed-in the hands of the communities most affected and the organizations most qualified to do the work.

We support this bill and encourage others to also endorse this bill. For more information on Peace In The Hood, Inc. of Ohio, contact: Khalid A. Samad at (216) 538-4043 or the offices of Peace In The Hood, Inc. at (216) 283-4400 x 2266. For more information on the Youth PROMISE Act, please contact Representative Bobby Scott's Office at 202-225-8351.

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