



OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT

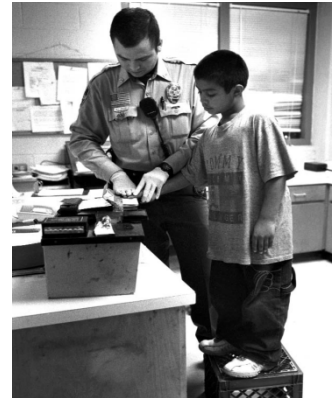
The Youth PROMISE Act (H.R. 2197)

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Preventing Crime vs. "Playing Tough on Crime Politics"

For decades, the primary response to crime has consisted of "tough on crime" sounding political slogans such as "three strikes and you're out" or "you do the adult crime, you do the adult time." As appealing as these policies may sound, the impact of codifying them ranges from a negligible reduction in crime to an actual *increase* in crime.¹

As a result of this over-emphasis on so-called "tough on crime" approaches, the U.S. now has the highest average incarceration rate of any nation in the world², by far. And the "tough on crime" approach has not been cheap. Corrections costs in this country have risen from around \$7 Billion a year in 1980 to over \$68 Billion in recent years.³ The impact of this focus on incarceration falls disproportionately on minorities, particularly Blacks and Hispanics. For Black boys born in 2001 and since, the Sentencing Project estimates that one in every three will end up incarcerated in their lifetime⁴ without appropriate intervention, a trajectory the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) has described as a "cradle-to-prison pipeline."⁵



There is overwhelming evidence to show that children can move from a cradle to prison pipeline to a cradle to college and career pipeline. All the credible research shows that a continuum of comprehensive, evidenced-based prevention and intervention programs for youth at risk of, or involved in, delinquent behavior will greatly reduce crime and save much more than they cost when the avoided law enforcement and social welfare expenditures are considered. And the research reveals that these programs are most effective when provided in the context of a coordinated, collaborative local strategy involving law enforcement and other local public and private entities working with children identified as being at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.⁶

The Youth PROMISE Model Prevents Crime and Saves Money

Under the Youth PROMISE (Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education) Act, communities facing the greatest youth gang and crime challenges will be able to develop a comprehensive response to youth violence through a coordinated prevention and intervention response. Representatives from local law enforcement, the school system, court services, social services, health and mental

¹ Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice, "No More Children Left Behind Bars", Harvard Law School, March, 2008, p. 12. <http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org/Publications/Item.aspx?id=100012>.

² International Centre for Prison Studies, "World Prison Population List", Eighth Edition, Kings College, London, January 2009, p.1, http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/law/research/icps/downloads/wppi-8th_41.pdf.

³ *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t122006.pdf>. Adjusted for inflation (2006 dollars, the year of the \$68 billion figure, from the most recent, available data), the U.S. spent about \$17 billion dollars on corrections in 1980.

⁴ Mauer, Marc and Ryan S. King, "Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration by Race and Ethnicity," The Sentencing Project, July 2007.

⁵ Children's Defense Fund, "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline", October, 2007, p.16.

⁶ Bumbarger, Jones, et al., "The Economic return on PCCD's Investment in Research-based Programs: A Cost-Benefit Assessment of Delinquency and Prevention in Pennsylvania", The Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development, Penn State, March 2008, p. 3 http://www.prevention.psu.edu/pubs/docs/PCCD_Report2.pdf.

health providers, the business community, and other public and private community and faith-based organizations will form a council to assess the problems and costs the community incurs as a result of youth violence, crime, and social welfare for teen pregnancy. The council will then develop a comprehensive plan for implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to address the problems and costs. The council will then ensure that the savings from implementing the programs are documented, so that some of the savings can be recaptured and applied to continue the program beyond the initial federal funding.

Nothing in the Youth PROMISE Act eliminates any of the current “tough on crime” laws. While it is understood that law enforcement will still continue to enforce those laws where necessary, research tells us that no matter how tough we are on the people we prosecute today, nothing will change unless we prevent the next generation of potential offenders from following the same pattern.

The Youth PROMISE Act has been proven to not only reduce crime but also to save much more money than it costs. An example of an “evidence-based” program under the Youth PROMISE Act is reflected by the State of Pennsylvania which implemented a process very similar to the one provided for in the Youth PROMISE Act in 100 communities across the state. The state found that it saved, on average, \$5 for every \$1 spent during the study period.⁷ An example of a “promising” program under the Youth PROMISE Act is the Richmond, Virginia Gang Reduction and Intervention Program (GRIP), a DOJ pilot program funded through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The program spent \$2.5 million in a collaborative effort between the City of Richmond, federal, state and local partners focusing on a target community. In two years, major crimes in that target community were down 43% and homicides fell from 19 to 2.⁸

Federal Funding Not Intended to Be On-Going

Cities that receive grants under the Youth PROMISE Act will be required to track governmental cost savings that accompany a drop in crime, and recapture a portion of those savings to keep the PROMISE programs alive after the federal grant period ends.

Supporters

In past Congresses, the Act has had broad, bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. There is also a coalition of over 250 national, state and local organizations that support the act. This coalition includes many cities and counties across the country that have passed resolutions in support, including Los Angeles, CA; Pasadena, CA; San Francisco, CA; Santa Fe County, NM; New York, NY; East Cleveland, OH; Pittsburgh, PA; Norfolk, VA; Newport News, VA; and Hampton, VA, and one state legislative body, the Vermont House of Representatives. In addition, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties have adopted resolutions urging Congress to pass the Youth PROMISE Act. We continue to work to build momentum for the Act and to encourage members of the 114th Congress to support this bipartisan legislation by becoming a co-sponsor.

The Youth PROMISE Act represents a paradigm shift in the way we address juvenile crime policy in America. Instead of doing what is politically expedient, we have the opportunity to both reduce crime and save money.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Neil H. Simon, "Richmond anti-gang program applauded" *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 16, 2008, pg. A1.

