

California Supports the Youth PROMISE Act (H.R. 3846)

April 7, 2008

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned organizations representing a broad array of children and youth advocates and organizations, express our strong support for the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act), H.R. 3846, and urge you to co-sponsor this important legislation.

This bill is a gang, delinquency and crime prevention and intervention bill, which addresses the root causes of youth and gang violence before crime occurs. Rather than creating additional and duplicative punitive approaches that do little to prevent youth from engaging in delinquent conduct, the Youth PROMISE Act builds upon evidence-based and promising practices proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency.

Specifically, the Youth PROMISE Act is a unique bill built upon strategies designed to respond directly to the needs of our community. The bill provides for:

- 1. The formation of local community committees – PROMISE Coordinating Councils – to come up with a solution specifically tailored for that community.** Under the Youth PROMISE Act, communities facing the greatest youth gang, delinquency and crime challenges will come together – via the PROMISE Coordinating Council, which is comprised of community-based organizations, schools, faith organizations, health, social services, law enforcement, the courts, and mental health providers – to develop and implement a comprehensive local plan to support young people and their families and make our communities safer, reduce victimization, and help at-risk young people to lead law-abiding and healthy lives, free from gangs, delinquency and/or criminal involvement.
- 2. Planning grants to assess the needs of each community.** The bill provides for a one year planning grant for each community facing a high risk of crime and gang activity. The grant will enable each community to assess unmet needs for preventing crime from occurring.
- 3. The use of evidence-based and promising practices and programs for prevention and intervention.** The Youth PROMISE Act builds upon the broad array of evidence-based and promising strategies that are proven effective to reduce and prevent youth violence and delinquency. These practices are rooted in science, they are replicable, and their efficacy has been proven. In addition, the bill requires that thorough assessment and evaluation measures be implemented to ensure that resources are directed toward communities faced with the highest levels of crime and gang activity.
- 4. Evaluations to assure cost savings related to prevention and intervention practices.** The Youth PROMISE Act provides for thorough 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. Under the Youth PROMISE Act, savings from investments in prevention and intervention programs such as early childhood education, after-school, mentoring, and other programs, shall be reinvested in prevention and intervention efforts funded under the Act.

5. Resources for law enforcement. The Youth PROMISE Act also provides for the hiring and training of Youth Oriented Policing (YOPS) officers to prevent and address juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity in a manner that is responsive to the research on juveniles and adolescent brain development. Additionally, the Act includes support for youth victim and witness protection programs, which are critical to deter crime, as well as extended and increased authorizations for the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant program to support juvenile justice systems.

The Youth PROMISE Act is a direct response to what is occurring in our state. As you know, in California:

- In 2005, approximately 10.4 million children were living in California.ⁱ
- 100,451 California children were living in foster care in 2005.ⁱⁱ
- An estimated 763,000 California children (7.3% of all California children ages 0-18) were uninsured in 2005.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In 2006, there were 232,849 juvenile arrests in California.^{iv}
- An estimated 16,782 California youth were in residential placement in 2003.^v
- California is home to the worst racial disparity in the nation in terms of the number of children serving sentences of life without parole. Eighty-five percent of youth sentenced to life without parole in California are people of color, with 75% of all cases in California being African American or Hispanic youth.^{vi}

The Youth PROMISE Act is unique among legislative proposals being considered in Congress aimed at curbing youth and gang violence. In contrast to enforcement-oriented legislation such as H.R. 3547 that would funnel more young people into the juvenile and criminal justice systems, the Youth PROMISE Act builds upon promising and evidence-based practices that have been proven to prevent and reduce rates of violence and delinquency. The Youth PROMISE Act works to address these troubling statistics by investing in youth and communities, rather than increasing the already staggering incarceration numbers. The Youth PROMISE Act makes sense, comports with the research on adolescent brain development and crime and violence prevention and intervention, and will yield overall savings to the community. We are hopeful that you will take into account our strong support for the Youth PROMISE Act H.R. 3846, and become a co-sponsor of this important legislation. Please contact Ilana Brunner in Representative Bobby Scott's office at 202-225-6696 or at ilana.brunner@mail.house.gov to sign on, or for more information.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

California Organizations in Support of the Youth PROMISE Act

ACLU of Northern California, San Francisco, CA

ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties, San Diego, CA

ACLU of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA

Beit T'Shuvah Residential Treatment & Prevention Center, Los Angeles, CA

Books Not Bars, Oakland, CA

Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Los Angeles, CA

Center for Capital Assistance, San Francisco, CA

Children's Defense Fund – California, Oakland, CA
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), Los Angeles, CA
Coalition L.A. (COLA), Los Angeles, CA
Homies Unidos, Los Angeles, CA
Families to Amend California's Three Strikes (FACTS), Los Angeles, CA
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Los Angeles, CA
W. Haywood Burns Institute, San Francisco, CA
National Council of Crime and Delinquency, San Francisco, CA
Pacific Juvenile Defender Center, San Francisco, CA
Parent Institute for Quality Education, Modesto, CA
Stop Prisoner Rape, Los Angeles, CA
U.S. Dream Academy, Inc., Los Angeles, CA
Watts Labor Community Action Committee, Los Angeles, CA
Youth Justice Coalition, Los Angeles, CA
Youth Law Center, San Francisco, CA

Academics/ Individuals

Dr. Aaron Kipnis, Pacifica Graduate Institute

Dr. Craig Reinerman, Department of Sociology & Legal Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

Professor Michael S. Wald, Stanford Law School

ⁱ 2005 California Health Interview Survey <http://www.chis.ucla.edu/>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/statistics/entryexit2005.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ 2005 California Health Interview Survey <http://www.chis.ucla.edu/>

^{iv} California Department of Justice, Division of California Justice Information Services, Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis. Crime in California, 2006. Table 18

^v Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook, at <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/>

^{vi} For more information, see Human Rights Watch, When I Die They'll Send Me Home: Youth Sentenced to Life Without Parole in California, January 2008.