

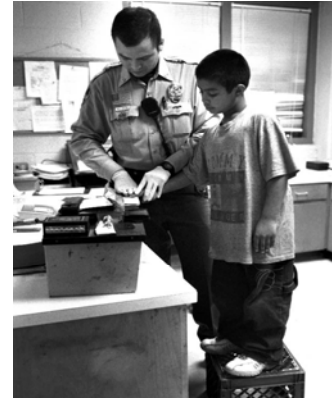
# The Youth PROMISE Act

(H.R. 1064 / S. 435)

## Fighting juvenile crime vs. “playing politics”

For too long, Congress has chosen to play politics by enacting so-called “tough on crime” 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 impacts of codifying these sound bytes range from a negligible reduction in crime to an actual *increase* in crime.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. now has the highest average incarceration rate of any nation in the world<sup>2</sup>, with the impact of this focus on slogan driven law enforcement disproportionately falling on minorities, particularly Blacks and Hispanics. For Black boys being born in 2001, the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) estimates that one in every three will end up incarcerated in their lifetime without appropriate intervention, a trajectory the CDF has described as a “cradle-to-prison pipeline.”<sup>3</sup>



There is overwhelming evidence to show that it is entirely feasible to move children from a cradle to prison pipeline to a cradle to college, or jobs, pipeline. All the credible research shows that a continuum of evidenced-based prevention programs for youth identified as being at risk of involvement in delinquent behavior, and intervention for those already involved, will greatly reduce crime and save much more than they cost when compared to the avoided law enforcement and social welfare expenditures. 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 at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.

## The PROMISE Model Fights Crime, 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 health providers, foster care providers, other community and faith-based organizations will form a council to develop a comprehensive plan for implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies. The plans can be funded up to four years. The act also enhances state and local law enforcement efforts regarding youth and gang violence.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

<sup>2</sup> 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/wpp1-8th\\_41.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/law/research/icps/downloads/wpp1-8th_41.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Children’s Defense Fund, “America’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline”, October, 2007, p.16.

Nothing in the Youth PROMISE Act eliminates any of the current tough on crime laws, and while it is understood that law enforcement will still continue to enforce those laws, research tells us that no matter how tough we are on the people we prosecute today, unless we are addressing the underlying root causes of criminal activity, nothing will change.

Aside from reducing crime and providing better results in the lives of our youth, many of the programs funded under the Youth PROMISE Act will save more money than they cost. The State of Pennsylvania 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.<sup>4</sup> 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, 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 two.<sup>5</sup> 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 four year federal grant period ends.

### **Moving Forward**

The Act currently has 219 co-sponsors in the House, including 18 Republicans. In the Senate, the Act was introduced by Sens. Casey (D-PA) and Snowe (R-ME) and has 8 co-sponsors. There is also a coalition of over 230 national, state and local organizations that support the act. This coalition also includes many cities and counties across the country that have passed resolutions in support of Youth PROMISE, including Los Angeles, CA, Pasadena, CA, Santa Fe County, NM, New York, NY, East Cleveland, OH, Pittsburgh, PA, Norfolk, VA, Newport News, VA, and Hampton, VA. The US Conference of Mayors, at their 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in June 2009 adopted a resolution urging Congress to pass the Youth PROMISE Act. A Hearing on the Youth PROMISE Act will be held July 15 in the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.



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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.

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<sup>4</sup>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](http://www.prevention.psu.edu/pubs/docs/PCCD_Report2.pdf)  
<sup>5</sup> Neil H. Simon, "Richmond anti-gang program applauded" *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 16, 2008, pg. A1.