

## **February Action: Letters to Editors on Youth PROMISE Act**

This month we will write to our newspapers about the Youth PROMISE Act – and send/bring our Congress Members copies of all letters – published or not!

**Informing the public and Congress about practical peacebuilding tools, and important legislation for reducing youth violence and incarceration, is what this action is about.**

**News items your letter might respond to** include any story/column about:

- Youth incarceration and/or violence – focusing on problems or solutions
- Adult incarceration and/or violence – focusing on problems or solutions
- Budget discussions – about the need to reduce public expenses (jail is costly!)
- Neighborhood safety or police/community relations
- Others - Be creative with your “bridging” - Everything is connected!!

Every paper has its own criteria regarding letter length and other considerations. Please use the “E.P.I.C.” structure – below - with some suggested content for each section.

### **Basic Steps**

1. Identify local daily newspapers. Find list here: [http://bit.ly/find\\_newspapers](http://bit.ly/find_newspapers)
2. Identify an article in the paper that addresses some issue relevant to youth violence and/or incarceration. From local violence to international conflict, or maybe noteworthy solutions, a plethora of issues should be available.
3. Look in the paper’s (print or online) editorial section - find criteria for letters.
4. Read a few LTEs they have published to get an idea of how writers begin them.
5. Draft your letter, using the paper’s criteria and the E.P.I.C. format below.
6. The more letters sent in by your team, the more likely at least one of them will be published. Please be sure to write unique letters!
7. Follow-up – bring or send all letters (published or not) to ALL THREE of your federal elected representatives!!

***Please find an article in today’s paper, and submit your letters TODAY  
Have Fun, Write Well, and Build Peace!***

### **The “E.P.I.C.” Format**

Please frame everything in your own words.

**Engage:** Reference an article or column in your paper with some potential connection to youth violence/incarceration or the cessation of youth violence/incarceration.

In about one sentence state your reaction to the article, perhaps a positive reaction to the celebration of some success, or some concern/sadness/frustration about an issue they have written about. **Your creativity is needed to build the “bridge” – from their article to the YPA.**

**Problem:** Mention (in your own words, but perhaps using info provided below) the high human and economic costs of youth violence and incarceration.

U.S. youth homicide rates are ten times higher than other leading industrial countries. And we lock up more youth than the next 12 leading industrialized nations combined.<sup>1</sup> The cost to incarcerate a youth for a year ranges from around \$60,000 to over \$300,000 – and the total annual cost nationwide is over \$21 billion.<sup>2</sup>

Info about local community problems and/or solutions is always a big bonus!

**Inform About the Solution: Effective Programs which Need More Support** States (like Texas, Georgia, and Mississippi) that have recently implemented substantial reforms to reduce incarceration have also seen their crime rates drop more than states where incarceration has continued to expand.<sup>3</sup>

Pennsylvania adopted a similar approach to the Youth PROMISE Act, and over a ten year period they saved \$5 for every \$1 invested.<sup>4</sup> Due to the shrinking number of juvenile detainees, they were able to close a 100-bed juvenile detention facility.

Within two years of implementing a Restorative Discipline program in West Phila. High School, incidents of assault and disorderly conduct dropped more than 65%<sup>5</sup>.

Do you know of any strong youth-oriented peacebuilding resources in your community?

**Call to Action:**

Ask your Members of the US Senate and House (by name) **to become initial co-sponsors** of the Youth PROMISE Act.

**Signing Off** - You might mention that you are a local Peace Alliance volunteer. (Some papers may limit letters to 150 or 200 words, so make each section concise.)

**Youth PROMISE Act:**

The Youth PROMISE Act (Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education) is bipartisan legislation. The act will fund, implement, and evaluate an array of evidence-based, locally controlled youth and gang violence prevention and intervention practices.

It would create unprecedented investments in proven community-based violence prevention and intervention practices, such as mentoring, after school programs and other innovative diversion strategies, like: gang violence prevention, teachers doing conflict resolution and bullying cessation education in schools, restorative justice practices and many others.

The bill 1) funds evidence-based violence prevention & intervention practices, 2) empowers local control and community oversight, 3) reduces crime and saves taxpayer money, and 4) creates accountability by linking funding to measurable success.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://jdcresource.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/us-mass-incarceration-image1.png>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2014/12/09/what-youth-incarceration-costs-taxpayers>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/11/19/texas-georgia-mississippi-set-conservative-example-for-criminal-justice-reform>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.prevention.psu.edu/pubs/docs/PCCD\\_Report2.pdf](http://www.prevention.psu.edu/pubs/docs/PCCD_Report2.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/educators/goodnews/](http://fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/educators/goodnews/)