

February Action: Write your Senators about Youth PROMISE Act (and have someone on your team follow up with a phone call)

This month we are going to focus again on getting more Senate support for the Youth PROMISE Act, S. 1307, by writing a letter to both of your Senators (you can copy and send the same letter). The Senate may be taking up the legislation soon and we want to get as many co-sponsors on board as possible, ESPECIALLY Republicans. Beyond even co-sponsors, we are looking to create CHAMPIONS!!!

Reducing Youth Violence and Incarceration - through practical, local, life & money-saving methods – by promoting the Youth PROMISE Act - is what this letter is about.

Preparation:

1. Unless your Action Team has members from bordering states, all Action Team members should have the same two U.S. Senators. Ascertain whether your two US Senators are already co-sponsoring the Youth PROMISE Act (so you will know whether to thank them or urge them to co-sponsor in the letter - important):
 - a. Find your Senators here: www.peacealliance.org/congress-lookup -- then visit their website to get their contact information and phone numbers.
 - b. Go to www.peacealliance.org/ypa-sponsors View the short list of current co-sponsors
2. Most Senators have a contact form on their website that allows you to submit a typed letter. Another great option is to hand-write a letter and send it in by mail, which has a large impact.
3. Team leaders, if you believe many will write hand-written letters, please bring paper, envelopes and stamps (if needed, you can pass the hat and ask for stamp funds). Collect handwritten letters at the end to mail in. People can also use laptops, ipads, etc. to type letters and send either at meeting or at home. If people don't write and send at the meeting, create some kind of system to follow up afterwards -- by email or phone.
4. **Critical Follow-up:** one person from your group should be the liaison to each Senators office and follow-up to make sure they receive the group's letters (remember hand-written letter can take a couple of weeks to process due to anthrax checks). Call and ask for the relevant aide who handles this issue. These letters and phone calls are the **beginning or continuation of your relationship with your Senators' offices**. This is an opportunity to share your interests and potentially schedule a meeting,..We encourage all groups to begin, if you haven't already, scheduling in-person meetings with Congressional staff.

Outline

(please personalize, so every letter isn't the same)

1. **Introduce yourself briefly (I am a grandmother/teacher/college student/etc.)**
2. **Speak from your heart.** Share any relevant personal story(s) about why this issue is important to you. Do you know any youth who have been impacted by violence? Have you been the victim of violence? Have you been particularly affected or moved by the tragic waste of youth incarceration?
3. **Share some statistics** on violence prevention and incarceration (see talking points below)
4. **Call to Action: IMPORTANT** - Thank your US Senators for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors. (S. 1307) Request that they respond to you, so you know what position they are taking on the bill. This helps them form an official stance, which could make it more of a priority. **(If they are already a supporter, we can help them become a CHAMPION!)**

Sample Talking Points:

The Problems:

A World Health Organization Report found that U.S. youth homicide rates are ten times higher than other leading industrial countries – despite the U.S.'s much higher GDP, material resources, and crime laws.

The Centers for Disease Control found in 2006, 52% of those arrested for murder were under the age of twenty-five and 64.8% of those arrested for robbery were under the age of twenty-five.

“Tough on Crime” laws are not reducing crime. Stiffer penalties, longer prison sentences, and the construction of more jails, have only resulted in higher incarceration rates and no substantial reduction in youth violence. The United States continues to have youth violence rates that are significantly higher than any other developed country.

Bonus: Use local violence statistics for your state and community. Share any details you know or can research about how high the cost of violence is in your community/state. How much is spent on prisons? Youth incarceration? What are crime, and homicide rates? A quick Google search can find a lot.

Example Solutions YPA might amplify:

According to research by Mark A. Cohen, in dollars alone, the nation will save between \$2.0 and \$2.7 million for every child who is diverted from the criminal justice system.

Pennsylvania Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) is a treatment focused program targeting at-risk youth 12-17 years old exhibiting chronic/serious antisocial behavior. Trained clinicians deliver comprehensive care over 3-5 months, including crisis care and intensive skills coaching, to change home, school and community environments.

- MST programs have been proven to increase pro-social functioning, decrease truancy, and reduce drug and alcohol abuse, both immediately and over time. Those who have completed the program had 75% fewer substance related arrests 4 years after treatment.
- In 2008, MST produced an estimated \$30 million in savings for Pennsylvania.

Youth PROMISE Act:

The Youth PROMISE Act (Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education) is bipartisan legislation (H.R. 1318 & S. 1307). The act will fund, implement, and evaluate an array of evidence-based, locally controlled youth and gang violence prevention and intervention practices.

The bill's passage 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. (If you know of any good state or local programs, mention them by name.)

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.

The act creates a PROMISE Advisory Panel that will aid the selection of grantees and will develop standards of evaluation for intervention and prevention programs. The Advisory Panel will collect data for designated geographic areas to assess needs and existing resources for prevention and intervention.

By specifically focusing on violence prevention and intervention strategies, this bill ensures we are funding programs that save lives and give every young person the opportunity to meet his or her potential.