

January 2016 Action:

Letters to the Editor on Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday & Youth PROMISE Act

On Monday, January 18th, we celebrated the birth and life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Let's write Letters to our Editors (LTEs) supporting the Youth PROMISE Act, and invoking Dr. King's legacy toward a more "beloved community."

These letters will educate your community that this issue is important and that there are effective solutions, these letters will tell your members of Congress that we value constructive policies like the YPA, and these letters will tell the world that Dr King's Dream is alive.

Every paper has its own criteria regarding letter length and other considerations. For the structure of the content, please use the "E.P.I.C." format – illustrated below with some suggested content for each section.

Basic Steps

1. Identify local daily newspapers. Find list here: http://bit.ly/find_newspapers It is likely that only daily newspapers will report on MLK's birthday. A relevant article will likely be in the print edition on January 20th and in the online edition on the 19th. If you do not find one, you might reference an article about youth violence/incarceration.
2. Look in the paper or online to their letters to the editor section for criteria for submitting a letter.
3. Read a few LTEs they have published to get an idea of how writers begin them.
4. Ascertain whether your two US Senators and/or any local US House Members are already co-sponsoring the Youth PROMISE Act (so you will know whether to thank them or urge them to co-sponsor – mentioning them in a lte will likely get their attention): Go to www.congress.gov and enter S1770 or HR2197 to view the list of current co-sponsors
5. Write and submit your letter, using their 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. Just be sure to write unique letters.

Note: please respond directly, in your letter, to a particular article or column that you've seen in that paper you are writing to.

Have Fun, Write Well, and Build Peace!

The "E.P.I.C." Format

Please state everything in your own words

Engage:

To the Editors:

Reference an article about MLK's birthday, and/or some relevant local story about youth violence or crime. In about one sentence state your reaction to it, how you felt reading it.

Problem:

Mention (in your own words) the national tragedy of rampant youth violence and incarceration.

As we reflect on MLK's birthday and his life's work, he might see some progress toward his "dream," but so much more needs to be done, particularly in the area of urban violence and incarceration, which disproportionately affects minority youth.

Provide a few statistics (e.g. Homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans between the ages of 10 and 24, and it is the second-leading cause of death for Asians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and Latinos of the same age. While people of color make up about [30 percent](#) of the United States' population,

they account for [60 percent](#) of those imprisoned. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, [one in three black men](#) can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. Students of color face harsher punishments in school than their white peers, leading to a higher number of youth of color incarcerated. Black and Hispanic students represent more than [70 percent](#) of those involved in school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement. Currently, African Americans make up [two-fifths](#) and Hispanics [one-fifth](#) of confined youth today)

We owe it to the work of MLK and the nonviolent civil rights movement he led, to carry on his vision and work. An oft-cited quote from Dr. King: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Even if these youth aren’t in our particular neighborhood, the effect is felt everywhere. We cannot continue to allow many of our own communities to be essentially war zones.

Inform About the Solution:

“I believe Dr. King would have been a big supporter of the Youth PROMISE Act.” The YPA, a bi-partisan bill currently before both houses of Congress. (H.R.2197 and S.1770), will give our communities the support and funding they need to effectively address youth violence and incarceration issues.

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. This bill will go a long way towards saving lives and giving every young person the opportunity to meet his or her potential.

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.

The state of Pennsylvania recently adopted a similar approach to the Youth PROMISE Act, and over a ten year period they saved \$5 for every \$1 invested. Due to the shrinking number of juvenile detainees, they were able to close a hundred-bed detention facility. In West Philadelphia High School, within two years of implementing a Restorative Discipline program, incidents of assault and disorderly conduct dropped more than 65%, and after the Longmont Community Justice Partnership (in Longmont Colorado) implemented its Community Restorative Justice Program, recidivism rates dropped to less than 10% in its first three years¹;

Such programs need much more attention and funding (though the projected eventual cost savings from reducing incarceration are huge). Let’s destroy what is often called the cradle to prison pipeline, with empowering programs and support for our most valuable asset, our children. Dr. King would have supported and worked tirelessly for no less.

Call to Action:

Thank your US Senators and Members of the House of Representatives (by name) for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors. (See the “Basic Steps” above, number 4 for a way to find out if your Federal Representatives are co-sponsors).

You might also call on fellow citizens to support Youth Promise Act via www.YouthPromiseAction.org.

(Depending on your paper’s criteria, you may be limited to 150 or 200 words, so you may need to keep each of these sections very concise.)

Signing Off

Under your signature mention that you are a member of The Peace Alliance locally – and an Action Team Member, if you are.

¹ National Research Center’s Analysis of the Longmont Community Justice Partnership 2007-2009
http://www.lcjp.org/images/stories/pdf/LCJP_2007-2009_Report_Final.pdf