

**July 2014 Action: Write a Letter to the Editor about House Bill HR 808,
The U.S. Department of Peacebuilding Act of 2013**

"Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace." - President Dwight D. Eisenhower

This month's Action is to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper in support of The Bill to Create a US Department of Peacebuilding.

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 Look in the paper or online in their letters section to find the criteria for submitting a letter.
2. Read a few LTEs they have published to get an idea of how writers begin them.
3. Ascertain whether your two US Senators and/or any local US House Members are already co-sponsoring HR 808 (so you will know whether to thank them or urge them to co-sponsor – mentioning them in a lte will likely get their attention):
 - a. Go to www.congress.gov, and type in "HR 808" to see the list of current co-sponsors
4. Identify a relevant article to respond to in your letter.*
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: It is generally easy to find a recent article relevant to our work. The need for more proliferation of powerful peacebuilding tools is clear. Have Fun, Write Well, and Build Peace!***

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

Please state everything in your own words.

Engage:

Reference an article (some relevant local story about youth violence or crime). In about one sentence state your reaction to it.

Problem:

Mention (in your own words) the area of concern highlighted by the article.

Inform About the Solution:

Describe successful, powerful, effective, promising practices – we are promoting "hope with teeth."

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). (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.

Some Basic In-depth Background

What is HR 808 - the Department of Peacebuilding Act?

HR 808 will establish a Cabinet-level Federal Department focused on the cultivation of peace as a national policy objective, including development of policies that promote domestic and international conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution. This mission will be carried out by establishing within the Department Offices of: Peace Education and Training, Domestic Peace Activities, International Peace Activities, Technology for Peace, Arms Control and Disarmament, Peacebuilding Information and Research, Human Rights and Economic Rights and the Intergovernmental Advisory Council on Peace. These offices will collaborate and share resources with government agencies, nongovernment entities, educators, business and the private sector to create and promulgate proven and cost effective measures, programs and policies. This new Department would research, promote, and provide leading edge peacebuilding practices for every level of society. Approximately 85% of its focus would be domestic.

Sample Talking Points

Below are just a few measures of the need for peacebuilding, as well as some of the many effective trends and programs that are working and would be strengthened by the united focus, collaboration, and networking that a U.S. Department of Peacebuilding would provide. A much longer list is available at <http://peacealliance.org/tools-education/statistics-on-violence/>

Costs of Violence

- The 2012 United States Peace Index (Published by the Institute for Economics and Peace) analyzed the costs associated with violence and the socio-economic measures associated with peace and reported that the total cost of violence to the United States—including lost productivity from violence—was conservatively calculated to be over \$460 billion.
- The Global Peace Index (Published by the Institute for Economics and Peace) reports that the United States spent \$1.7 trillion for violence containment in 2012, which is equivalent to 11% of GDP and a \$5,485 annual cost for every woman, man, and child. The U.S. spends more for violence containment than any other nation.

Solutions

- In the US there are currently 227 college and graduate level degree programs in Peace and Conflict Studies – this signifies a generation of budding experts, preparing to embark in this growing peacebuilding economy.
- The Center for NonViolent Communication (NVC) is one of many organizations teaching people how to have greater authenticity in their communication, increased understanding, deepening connection and conflict resolution.
- The Community Conferencing Center in Baltimore, Maryland, provides a forum for people who have experienced harm to find ways to repair the damage caused and to minimize further harm. Community Conferencing, the first such program to be conducted in a large American city, has resulted in a 60% reduction in recidivism in young offenders compared to similar juvenile justice cases in the traditional juvenile justice system.
- The Conflict Stabilization Operations Bureau of the State Department has worked effectively and cooperatively to reduce violence in hotspots worldwide – they helped reduce election-related deaths in Kenya from over 1,300 in 2007 to under 20 in 2013. This is the type of program that H.R. 808 would expand.
- The Complex Crises Fund at USAID has provided fast, flexible locally empowering responses to volatile situations throughout the world. In post conflict Sri Lanka since 2009, CCF has assisted locals in overcoming ethnic strife to plant over 100,000 acres of key crops. This is another type of program that H.R. 808 would seek to expand.
- The US Institute of Peace A US Department of Peacebuilding would cooperate with and support the USIP's important policy research.