

May Action: Letters to Editors on Youth PROMISE Act

This month we will write to our newspapers about the Youth PROMISE Act in the context of Mother's Day – and send/bring our Congress Members any letters that are published!

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

Two media hooks: 1) In the name of Mother's Day let's take care of all our children. 2) Mother's Day was begun as a call to end all wars – peace can begin in our homes, schools, communities. Every paper has its own criteria regarding letter length and other considerations. Please use the "E.P.I.C." structure – illustrated below with some suggested content for each section.

Basic Steps

1. Identify local daily newspapers. Find list here: 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. Ascertain whether your US House/Senate Members are already co-sponsoring H.R. 1318/S.1307, so you can thank them or urge them to co-sponsor – see the list of co-sponsors at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php> enter "HR 1318" then "S 1307" in the bill number field.
6. Draft your letter, using the paper's criteria and the E.P.I.C. format below.
7. 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!
8. Follow-up – bring or send any published letters to ALL your federal representatives!!

***We suggest you find an article in today's paper and complete and submit your letters TODAY together at your meeting! (If you intend to write a more expanded piece as an Op-Ed, you will probably submit it closer to Mother's Day)
Have Fun, Write Well, and Build Peace!***

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

Please frame everything in your own words.

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

It might be something on youth trauma, gang or youth violence, prison reform or any other potentially relevant issue in your community. You could also "bridge" from an article focusing on more broad issues of violence, war, or other conflict. In about one sentence state your reaction to the article, perhaps a positive reaction to the celebration of some work, or some concern/sadness/frustration about an issue they have written about. **Your creativity is needed to build that "bridge" – from their article to the YPA (and potentially including reference to Mother's Day).**

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

A World Health Organization Report found that U.S. youth homicide rates are ten times higher than other leading industrial countries. And we lock up more juveniles than any other nation.¹ 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.

Inform About the Solution: Effective Programs Around the Country (which Need More Support)

Pennsylvania adopted a similar approach to the Youth PROMISE Act, and over a ten year period they saved \$5 for every \$1 invested.² 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 Philadelphia High School, incidents of assault and disorderly conduct dropped more than 65%³.

Call to Action:

Thank your Members of the Senate and/or House of Representatives (by name) for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors.

(Some papers may limit letters to 150 or 200 words, so each of these sections may be very concise. They usually ask you to include address and daytime and nighttime phone number.)

Signing Off - Under your signature, you might mention that you are a volunteer of The Peace Alliance locally.

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 near you, please 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.

¹ <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541447.pdf>

² 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

³ fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/educators/goodnews/