

November 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 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).

Reducing Youth Violence and Incarceration - through practical, local, life & money-saving methods – and 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 list of current co-sponsors
 - c. Unless your Senator is Sen. Mary Landrieu (LA), Sen. James Inhofe (OK), or Sen. Tim Kaine (VA) then yours is probably not yet a co-sponsor.
2. Most Senators have a contact form on their website that you can submit a letter. Another great option is to hand-write a letter and send it in by mail, which has a large impact. You can also type it out and submit on website.
3. Team leaders, if you believe many will write hand-written letter, 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. Follow-up: one person from your group should be the liaison to each Senators office and follow-up to make sure they receive the groups letters. Remember 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, if your group feels ready to take that step.

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. (H.R. 1318 & 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:

Homicide and suicide are the second and third leading causes of death in the US among people aged 15-19, The US is about 5% of the world's population, yet accounts for more than 25% of the world's incarceration, A 2002 study found that the US incarcerates more than ten times as many people under

age 18 as any of the of the other 20 industrialized nations studied – in most cases more than twenty times as many.)

In 2006, the United States' inmate population of 2,312,414 exceeded China's, and China's total population is four times as large.

Some Juvenile incarceration facilities cost between \$140,000 and \$200,000 per person per year, according to Mishy Faruqee, director of the Youth Justice Program at the Children's Defense Fund-NY.

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?

Some Solutions:

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.

After the Longmont Community Justice Partnership (in Longmont Colorado) implemented its Community Restorative Justice Program, recidivism rates among youth dropped to less than 10% in its first three years, compared to a county-wide rate of over 50%; and in West Philadelphia High School, within two years of implementing a Restorative Discipline program, incidents of assault and disorderly conduct dropped more than 65%.

A study by the non-partisan Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that diversion and mentoring programs produced \$3.36 of benefits for every dollar spent, aggression replacement training produced \$10 of benefits for every dollar spent, and multi-systemic therapy produced \$13 of benefits for every dollar spent -- in terms of reduced crime and the cost of crime to taxpayers.

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 practitioners 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.

Cities that receive grants under the Youth PROMISE Act will be required to track governmental cost savings that accompany a drop in crime, and recapture a portion of those savings to keep the PROMISE programs alive after the federal grant period ends.

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.