

January 2015 Action
Seek Your House Member's Support as an Initial Co-Sponsor for the Youth PROMISE Act, with an Email Message and a Phone Call

Let's capitalize on all the great momentum we helped to build during the last Congressional session. A new version of the bill will be introduced in the coming weeks. Please encourage your elected representatives to have their names on the co-sponsor list when that happens. The Youth PROMISE Act currently has no bill numbers, but your Congress Member can contact the office of the lead sponsor – Congressman Bobby Scott – and become an initial co-sponsor. You can call your Member's local area office and also the D.C. office, for good measure.

Making stronger, safer communities – using proven peacebuilding tools – and ending epidemics of youth incarceration and violence – is what this action is about.

Preparation:

1. Ascertain whether your House Member was a co-sponsor during the last session – if s/he was, s/he will be far more likely to sign on as an initial co-sponsor in this session.
 - a. At www.peacealliance.org/ypa-sponsors you can see last session's co-sponsors.
2. Most Members have a contact form on their website that allows you to submit a typed letter. On their site you can also find phone contact information. Today we ask you to send email, and follow up with a phone call (*if you call over the weekend, you will most likely be leaving a message).
3. **Critical Follow-up:** Call to emphasize the importance of your message, to seek to learn your Member's thoughts/feelings about the bill, and possibly to schedule a time to meet in-person. Please call both their D.C. office, and also the office nearest you – it is worthwhile to build relationships with local staffers, and also with the issue specialists in Washington.

Letter Outline

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

1. **Introduce yourself briefly (I am a grandmother/teacher/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? Are you aware of any local, regional, or national resources that reduce violence/incarceration among youth? (see some examples below).
3. **Share some statistics** on violence prevention and incarceration (see below).
4. **Call to Action: IMPORTANT** - Thank your House Member if they co-sponsored the bill in the last session, and ask them to become initial cosponsors in this current session. 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, help them become a CHAMPION!)**

Sample Talking Points

The Problems:

We in the US incarcerate more juveniles than the next 12 nations combined.¹

Approximately 93,000 young people are currently in detention in the US, most of them costing taxpayers over \$80,000 per person per year.²

¹ <http://jdcresource.wordpress.com/2012/09/01/39/>

Bonus: Share any details you know or can research about violence/incarceration in your community/state. Youth incarceration costs? Youth crime rates? A Google search can find a lot.

Example Solutions YPA might amplify:

Research shows that early prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation are highly effective in reducing crime.³

Pennsylvania adopted a similar approach to the Youth PROMISE Act, and over a ten year period they saved \$5 for every \$1 invested.⁴ 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%⁵.

A recent Maryland juvenile justice study found that young “offenders” who participated in a Community Conference were 60% less likely to reoffend.⁶

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. Lead co-sponsors in the House will be Bobby Scott (VA) and Walter Jones (NC).

The YPA would create unprecedented investments in proven community-based violence prevention and intervention practices, such as mentoring, after school programs, restorative discipline programs, peer mediation, and other effective solutions.

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.

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.

² http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/09_05_rep_costsofconfinement_jj_ps.pdf

³ <http://www.publiceye.org/defendingjustice/pdfs/factsheets/9-Fact%20Sheet%20-%20US%20vs%20World.pdf>

⁴ 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

⁵ fixschooldiscipline.org/toolkit/educators/goodnews/

⁶ <http://www.communityconferencing.org/index.php/impact/>