

March 2014 Action

Write your House of Representatives Member about Youth PROMISE Act (and follow up with a phone call)

This action focuses on getting more House support for the Youth PROMISE Act, HR 1318, by writing a letter to your House Member. (Note: Teams will have an additional exciting project throughout this month also – pitching an editorial packet!! You may learn about it from your Action Team Leader).

Reducing Youth Violence and Incarceration - through practical, local, life & money-saving methods – by promoting the Youth PROMISE Act - is what this letter is about.

Preparation:

1. Ascertain whether your US House Member is 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):
Go to www.peacealliance.org/ypa-sponsors View an updated list of current co-sponsors [if you are not sure who your housemember is, and/or need contact info, you can look it up here: <https://org.salsalabs.com/o/696/getLocal.jsp>
2. Most Congressmembers have a contact form on their website that allows you to submit a typed letter. Today we'll ask you to hand-write a letter and send it in by mail, which has a large impact.
3. **Critical Follow-up:** have one person from your group designated as liaison to each Member's office and follow-up to make sure they receive the group's letters (remember hand-written letter can take a couple of weeks to process due to anthrax checks). Call the D.C. office and ask for the relevant aide who handles this type of issue (we are now urging you to make the D.C. office aide your primary contact). These letters and phone calls are the **beginning or continuation of your relationship with your House Members' offices**. This is an opportunity to share your interests and potentially schedule a meeting. We are currently encouraging all Action Teams to begin, if they haven't already, scheduling in-person meetings with Congressional staff.

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 House Members for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors. (HR 1318). 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!)**
5. **If your Member is already a co-sponsor, thank them and ask them to take it a step further by signing a "Dear Colleague" letter, or co-writing an op-ed with you in your local paper (offer to draft something for them).**

Sample Talking Points

The Problems:

According to the Bureau of Justice, the number of people under some form of correction supervision in the U.S. grew from 200,000 people in 1980 to almost 7 million today. We incarcerate ten times more juveniles per capita than any of the other ten leading industrialized countries – and are the only nation incarcerating youth for life without the possibility of parole.¹

Bonus: Use local anecdotes and/or statistics for your state and community. Share any details you know or can research ahead of time 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. Team leaders, or any members can bring to share with your group.

Example Solutions YPA might amplify:

Pennsylvania adopted a similar approach to what the Youth PROMISE Act could support, 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.

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 (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, 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.

The act creates a PROMISE Advisory Panel that will aid the selection of grantees and will develop standards of evaluation for intervention and prevention programs. The Advisory Panel will collect data for designated geographic areas to assess needs and existing resources for prevention and intervention.

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 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/