

January 15, 2008

Dear Representative:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA), to express our strong support for H.R. 3846, the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education (Youth PROMISE) Act introduced by Rep. Robert "Bobby" Scott (D-VA). The ABA is the world's largest voluntary professional organization, with a membership of over 400,000 lawyers, judges and law students worldwide. The ABA continuously works to improve the American system of justice and to advance the rule of law in the world. We support H.R. 3846 because it will effectively address youth violence and help thousands of youth to stay away from gangs and the criminal justice system and to become productive members of our communities.

The ABA believes that the Youth PROMISE Act takes the right approach to reducing gang violence. It focuses on assisting states and communities to undertake and implement comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to prevent and reduce youth violence while helping at-risk youth avoid gang activity and become productive members of their communities. Several of the other bills that address gang violence introduced in the 110th Congress would federalize ordinary street crime that should be handled at the state level and provide for enhanced penalties that we strongly oppose, such as mandatory minimum sentences or life without parole. Rather than focusing resources on bringing more youth into the juvenile and criminal justice systems, the Youth PROMISE Act is based on supporting community-based efforts to prevent youth from entering the justice system through implementation of evidence-based methods proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency.

The Youth PROMISE Act targets resources toward communities encountering increased youth gang and crime risks in order to enable those communities to begin to address their significant unmet needs for evidenced-based prevention and intervention investments. The Act will support each such community develop and implement a comprehensive plan for evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies targeted at young people and their families through a local council that includes the critical community components needed to prevent and reduce youth crime. It will support efforts by community councils made up of law enforcement, community-based organizations, schools, faith organizations, and health, social service, and mental health providers to make our communities safer, reduce victimization, and help at-risk young people to lead law-abiding and healthy lives, free from gang and criminal involvement.

The youth prevention strategies under the Youth PROMISE Act include programs proven to reduce the likelihood of a young person joining a gang and/or committing a delinquent act, including: early childhood education; home visiting for parent training; youth development after-

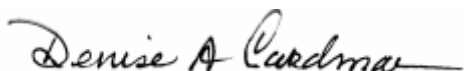
school efforts; mentoring; mental health services; substance abuse prevention services, and effective approaches to keeping youth in school. The intervention strategies include targeted funding based upon each community's needs assessment and a subsequent strategic youth crime and gang intervention plan – from a broad array of programs proven to reduce the likelihood of a young offender's recidivism, including evidence-based risk-analysis-focused assessments, as well as proven-effective individual and family therapeutic interventions, community re-entry activities, witness protection, youth victim witness assistance, and other services.

The Youth PROMISE Act also provides for training, hiring and support of “Youth Oriented Policing” officers to implement strategic activities to minimize youth crime and victimization and reduce the long-term involvement of juveniles in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The bill establishes a Center for Youth Oriented Policing which would be responsible for identification, development and dissemination to law enforcement agencies best practices for Youth Oriented Policing techniques and technologies. Research shows that youth oriented policing is much more effective in working with youth and reducing recidivism than other, non-youth oriented law enforcement approaches.

Additionally, the proposed Act provides for thorough evaluation, including analyses of the cost-savings to our society yielded by investing in prevention and intervention rather than in after-the-fact prosecution and incarceration. After decades of increasing reliance on incarceration, there are currently 2.2 million people in federal and states jails and prisons in the United States – more than any other nation – and, according to the most recent Bureau of Justice Statistics, with costs annually equaling \$65 billion. The Act will sustain investment in evidence-based prevention and intervention practices by authorizing \$2.3 billion per year over five years. The Youth PROMISE Act's savings from investments and prevention and intervention programs will be reinvested in promising evidence-based programs aimed at reducing entry into the criminal justice system and reducing our outsized jail and prison population.

We urge you to support and cosponsor this important legislation. The Youth PROMISE Act is a critically important proposal that will keep young people out of the criminal justice system. We urge you to cosponsor H.R. 3846 and look forward to working with you to enact the Youth PROMISE Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise A. Cardman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Denise A. Cardman
Acting Director