

Justice Policy INSTITUTE

February 8, 2008

Dear Representative:

The Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act), H.R. 3846, is a critically important bill that focuses innovative crime-fighting resources in the communities that need them most and helps ensure that our young people receive the supports they need to grow into productive, accountable adults. On behalf of the Justice Policy Institute (JPI), I urge you to help ensure that this bill becomes law.

JPI is a non-partisan, not-for-profit think-tank dedicated to reducing society's reliance on incarceration and promoting effective public safety alternatives. Our research has overwhelmingly concluded that the most effective juvenile crime prevention measures invest in communities through evidenced-based practices. These methods of crime prevention are not only proven to keep our communities safe, but also reduce the number of youth who end up behind bars. The Youth PROMISE Act is based on these principles. Under the Act, communities would work collaboratively to select the evidenced-based programs that meet the needs of their youth. Because the Youth PROMISE Act mandates that communities use evidenced-based programs, once it is implemented, communities will be safer.

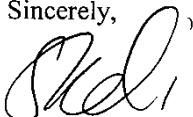
Not only will the Youth PROMISE Act keep us all safer, but it will save taxpayer dollars. The U.S. currently holds more than 2.2 million people in its prisons and jails at a staggering cost of approximately \$65 billion dollars per year. Programs like those established by the Youth PROMISE Act benefit taxpayers at a far greater rate than incarceration. When a community invests one dollar in drug treatment, it will receive \$18.52 in return from reduced crime and public safety benefits—but for every dollar invested in prison, the return is only \$.37.

Recent concerns about youth involvement in gangs have inspired overly punitive legislation that would sweep more young people, particularly youth of color, into prisons, disrupting a youth's natural inclination to cease delinquent behavior, and further increases the risk that a youth would participate in criminal activity in the future. This punitive legislation ignores recent data that shows providing positive alternatives to delinquent behaviors in the form of jobs, education and positive support services can help youth develop into responsible adults.

The Youth PROMISE Act would move our society away from punitive, ineffective and costly policies and toward a system of positive investments in communities and young people. In this way, H.R.3846 benefits us all. JPI is pleased to endorse such important legislation and urges you to do the same. Please feel free to contact me at 202-558-7974 x311 or sbedi@justicepolicy.org. To co-sponsor this legislation, please contact Erin Davies at 202-225-8351 or Erin.Davies@mail.house.gov.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sheila Bedi, Esq.
Executive Director