



December 17, 2007

Dear Representative:

Re: ACLU Supports H.R. 3846, the Youth PROMISE Act

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On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, a non-partisan organization with hundreds of thousands of activists and members and 53 affiliates nationwide, we write to support 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). This legislation would effectively address youth violence by providing resources to communities for comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies to decrease juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity.

The Youth PROMISE Act is unique among proposals being considered in Congress aimed at curbing youth violence. Several of the other gangs bills that have been introduced in Congress, result in federalizing ordinary street crime that should be handled at the state level. Rather than funneling more young people into the juvenile and criminal justice systems, the Youth PROMISE Act builds upon evidence-based practices that have been proven to reduce rates of violence and delinquency. The most recent Bureau of Justice Statistics figures indicate that annual spending on costs associated with incarceration equal \$65 billion in this country. H.R. 3846’s focus on prevention and intervention will address some of the root causes of youth violence in order to decrease the amount of money federal and state governments spend on incarceration. Specifically, this bill directs resources towards communities across the country that face an increased risk of crime and gang activity to enable those communities to begin to address significant unmet needs and prevent crimes from occurring in the first place.

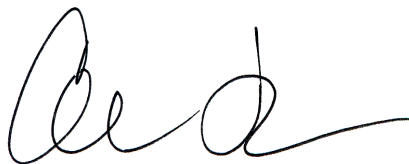
Under the bill, communities facing the greatest youth gang, delinquency and crime challenges will work at the local level thru a local council called a Promise Coordinating Council (“PCC”). The council will include representatives from law enforcement, community and faith-based organizations, schools, health, social services, and mental health providers. H.R. 3846 calls for the PCC’s to develop comprehensive local plans to support young people and their families, while making their communities safer, reducing rates of victimization, and helping at-risk youth lead law-abiding and healthy lives, free of gangs, delinquency and violence.

Additionally, the legislation provides for thorough evaluation, including analyses of the cost-savings to society yielded by investing in prevention and intervention rather than in far more costly, after-the-fact prosecution and incarceration. According to the most recent Department of Justice (DOJ) statistics, there are currently 2.2 million people in federal and state jails and prisons across the United States, more than any other country in the world. Disproportionately, offenders who are incarcerated in America are from low-income and minority communities. The Youth PROMISE Act's savings from investments in prevention and intervention programs will be reinvested in additional promising, evidence-based programs in an effort to reduce the alarmingly large prison population in this country.

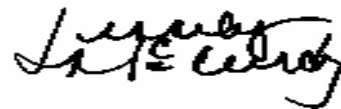
Finally, the bill takes important steps towards breaking the vicious "school-to-prison pipeline," wherein children, overwhelmingly children of color, in elementary, middle and high schools are pushed out of the classroom and into the juvenile and eventually adult criminal justice systems. With its focus on intervention and prevention, this legislation recognizes the importance of keeping young people out of the criminal justice system and in school in order to lead productive lives.

The Youth PROMISE Act gets it right with respect to crime and violence prevention and intervention, and it will yield important savings to affected communities, both financially and in overall quality of life. We are pleased to support H.R. 3846 and urge you to co-sponsor and fully support this important legislation. If you have questions about the ACLU's position on H.R. 3846, please feel free to contact Jesselyn McCurdy, Legislative Counsel, at phone: (202) 675-2314 or jmccurdy@aclu.org.

Sincerely,



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Director



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