



STUDENT PEACE ALLIANCE

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## Why Are American Youth Killing and Stealing More than Adults?

“Tough on Crime” laws are not reducing crime. Despite stiffer penalties, longer prison sentences, and the building of more jails, the result has been higher incarceration rates within the United States without a substantial reduction in youth violence. The United States continues to have youth violence rates that are significantly higher than any other developed country.

“For far too long,” said longtime advocate of juvenile justice Congressman Robert “Bobby” Scott, “Congress has chosen to play politics by enacting “tough on crime” slogans whose impacts range from a negligible reduction in crime to an increase in crime. As a result, the United States now has the highest average incarceration rate of any nation in the world. The cost of incarceration in this country has risen to over \$65 billion a year.”

The International Centre for Prison Studies found that the **U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world** – higher than Iran, Iraq and China combined.

A World Health Organization Report found that **U.S. youth homicide rates are ten times higher than other leading industrial countries** – despite the U.S.'s significantly higher GDP, material resources, and crime laws.

The Centers for Disease Control found in 2006, **52% of those arrested for murder were under the age of twenty-five**. 64.8% of those arrested for robbery were under the age of twenty-five.

A Human Rights Watch report found that as of 2008, **2,417 persons were serving life sentences without parole in the U.S. for crimes committed as children**. In contrast, 0 persons in any other country in the world are serving life sentences without parole for crimes committed as children.

Congressman Scott began in 2007 to write comprehensive legislation that would reduce youth violence. His committee and office took evidence from over 50 crime policy makers, researchers, practitioners analysts, and law enforcement officials from across the political spectrum concerning evidence and research based strategies to reduce youth violence and crime. What Congressman Scott discovered were recommendations like these:

**Paul Logli, Chairman of the National District Attorney's Association** testifying at hearing entitled: *Making Communities Safer: Youth Violence and Gang Interventions that Work*: “I don't need any more laws. I've got all the criminal laws I need in the state of Illinois. I don't need any more sanctions...what I need is programs on the street that have staying power and that have credibility.”

**According to the Youth Law Center**, “We cannot prosecute and imprison our way out of the gang problem. If we could, California would not remain the gang capitol of the world after all these years. We have the most extensive system of gang information, gang prosecution, and special law enforcement units in the world, as well as the longest sentences and greatest variety of gang sentencing enhancements. We also continue to have the most gang members.”

## Youth PROMISE Act

- “ **PROVEN INTERVENTION/PREVENTION PROGRAMS**
- “ **METRICALLY EVALUATED PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**
- “ **LOCAL OVERSIGHT/LEADERSHIP**
- “ **CUSTOM-TAILORED PROMISE PLANS**

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

In keeping with the overwhelming evidence that all peace-building programs fail without local community oversight and leadership: the act calls for the creation of **PROMISE Coordinating Councils** within those communities facing the greatest youth violence. **These Councils must have representatives (where possible) from:** the local chief executive’s office, a local educational agency, a local health agency or provider, a local mental health agency or provider, a local public housing agency, a local law enforcement agency, a local child welfare agency, a local juvenile court, a local juvenile prosecutor’s office, a private juvenile residential care entity, a local juvenile public defender’s office, a State juvenile correctional entity, a local business community representative, and a local faith-based community representative.

In addition, there must be representatives who are parents of children with an interest in the local juvenile or criminal justice systems; along with members from nonprofit community-based organizations that provide effective delinquency prevention and intervention to youth in the community.

Using established research and proven intervention/prevention programming **PCCs will develop a custom-tailored PROMISE plan for their community** that will be evaluated for performance standards by the Advisory Panel.

**The authorization of H.R. 1064** ensures that it will not be a “band-aid” measure. Research has documented that **long-term investments**, such as the Youth PROMISE Act, **yield tremendous savings** through the resulting reductions in youth violence, delinquency, crime, welfare, prison, and health re-cooperation costs.

The Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act H.R. 1064) was re-introduced into the 111th Congress on February 13, 2009. As of July 7, 2009 it has 219 co-sponsors and bi-partisan support.

## Programs That Work, Solutions For Peace Today

**Barrios Unidos** is a youth violence prevention/intervention and community awareness organization. The uniqueness of Barrios Unidos, Inc., lies in its transformational approach. It offers hope by exposing youth to the power of resiliency through utilizing adults and older youth who have themselves experienced and overcome the challenges young people face. Barrios Unidos draws upon the resources of adults and older youth that have made it out of the “street life;” assisting youth in choosing life-affirming behavior, positive self-esteem, constructive goals, supportive community, and cultural pride. Juan Pacheco provides many motivational speeches and presentations, as well as running educational youth groups. In addition to his work with Barrios Unidos, he founded the Kids Club/Computer Lab program.

**The Tariq Khamisa Foundation** was created to stop kids from killing kids. Named for Azim Khamisa's son, Tariq, who was senselessly murdered by a fourteen year old gang member. TKF has reached a half a million elementary and middle school children through its Violence Impact Forums and over 20 million via video programming. Mr. Khamisa has given over 300 keynote address speeches across the globe and is the successful author of *Azim's Bardo – From Murder to Forgiveness – A Father's Journey* and *From Forgiveness to Fulfillment*.

The **Ohio Dispute Resolution Commission** provided a mediation program designed to prevent truancy to more than 150 schools in the 2002-03 school year. The resulting increase in pupil attendance and decrease in tardiness for participating schools resulted in a total program cost savings of more than \$300,000—in one school year.

The **Community Conferencing Center** in Baltimore, Maryland, works to support communities and individuals in realizing they can safely and effectively resolve conflicts themselves. It is the first and only multi-sector program being conducted in a large American inner city, and works with issues related to youth and adult conflict and crime. Through the use of community conferences, it provides a forum in which those who have caused harm, those who have been harmed, and their respective supporters can find ways to repair damage caused and minimize future harm. Use of community conferencing has resulted in a 60% reduction in recidivism in young offenders compared to similar juvenile justice cases in the traditional juvenile justice system.

The Clallam Bay Corrections Center (CBCC) is a Level 5 (maximum security) facility which houses the most violent offenders in Washington State. Typically CBCC experiences an average of about 200 forcible rapes, severe assaults, and other violent acts each month. They participated in a trial program using the “**Violence Integrative Prevention and Restoration (PAR) Model**” taught by the **Edvita Institute** which is a non-punitive approach to dealing with violence. The goal of the trial was to reduce violence for one week. The results of the trial exceeded the one week goal, reducing violence 100% for nearly three weeks. There were zero infractions, zero segregation placements, and zero confrontations reported during the trial. If the PAR model were applied prior to incarceration on a state-wide level in Washington State, estimated savings would be roughly \$63 million per year.

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