

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

April 20, 2009

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Olympia Snowe
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
United States House of Representatives
1201 Longworth House Office
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael N. Castle
United States Senate
1233 Longworth House Office
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Casey and Snowe and Congressmen Scott and Castle:

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) strongly supports the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act) - S. 435 and H.R. 1064 - and would like to thank you for your bipartisan leadership on this legislation in the 111th Congress.

CFYJ is a non-profit organization dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. On any given day, nearly 10,000 young people are locked up in adult jails and prisons. Over the past two years, reports issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the U.S. Department of Justice found that youth transferred to the adult criminal justice system are more likely to commit crimes in the future when compared to youth who commit similar crimes, but are retained in the juvenile justice system. In addition, youth in adult facilities are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail and are at great risk of physical and sexual assault. Finally, as many as one-half of all transferred youth will ultimately be sent back to the juvenile justice system or not be convicted after spending months in jail.

Because of the harmful effects of trying youth as adults, CFYJ supports a continuum of reform for the juvenile justice and adult criminal justice systems that ensures youth receive an appropriate response for their actions and are given the proper support to get on a positive path to success. A critical piece of this continuum is keeping youth who are at-risk of involvement with gangs or the juvenile justice system out of the system altogether and helping youth already involved in gangs or the system to change course. We believe the Youth PROMISE Act would make significant strides toward these goals by making significant, positive, and cost-effective investments in youth at-risk of involvement in or involved in the juvenile justice and adult criminal justice systems.

By investing in prevention and intervention strategies, the Youth PROMISE Act emphasizes positive ways to cost-effectively reduce crime instead of focusing on punitive measures and more severe sanctions that lead to increases in racial and ethnic disparities and increased incarceration. CFYJ supports the Youth PROMISE Act because the legislation:

- Empowers and supports local communities: The Youth PROMISE Act targets funding to communities most in need of assistance with regard to gang and juvenile justice system involvement. Through the Youth PROMISE Council, which is comprised of a vast range of stakeholders in the juvenile justice system, the bill empowers these communities to identify how to effectively approach these issues by developing a comprehensive plan for implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies that reflect the particular opportunities and challenges confronting their community.
- Cost-effectively reduces crime: On any given day, over 90,000 youth are incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities at a cost of between \$32,000-\$65,000 per year. Seventy percent of these youth are held for nonviolent charges, such as property offenses or technical probation violations. In the adult criminal justice system, over 2 million individuals are incarcerated at a cost of over \$68 billion per year.

Fortunately, the Youth PROMISE Act provides critical supports for research-based alternatives to incarcerating youth that not only reduce crime, but save money. Research has shown that every dollar spent on evidence-based programs can yield up to \$13 in cost savings. Early interventions that prevent high-risk youth from engaging in repeat criminal offenses, such as Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care and Multisystemic Therapy, can save the public nearly \$5.7 million in costs over a lifetime.

- Supports the use of best practices in the juvenile justice field: By targeting funding toward evidence-based and promising practices, the Youth PROMISE Act supports research-based solutions to help youth get on a positive path to success. Through its support of regional and national research centers, the Youth PROMISE Act also supports communities in implementing these research-based solutions as well as developing and disseminating best practices in the juvenile justice field.

CFYJ strongly supports the Youth PROMISE Act and applauds you for your leadership on this key piece of legislation. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-558-3580 or lryan@cfyj.org.

Sincerely,

Liz Ryan
CEO and President
Campaign for Youth Justice