

STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

Governmental Affairs Office

740 Fifteenth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005-1022  
(202) 662-1760  
FAX: (202) 662-1762

CHAIR

Wm. T. Robinson III  
wrobinson@fbtlaw.com

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ABA DAY IN WASHINGTON  
PLANNING COMMITTEE

Laurel G. Bellows, Chair  
lbellows@bellowspc.com

December 1, 2009

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary  
United States House of Representatives  
2138 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20525

The Honorable Lamar Smith  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
United States House of Representatives  
2138 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20525

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

DIRECTOR

Thomas M. Susman  
(202) 662-1765  
susmant@staff.abanet.org

DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Denise A. Cardman  
cardmand@staff.abanet.org

SENIOR LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

R. Larson Frisby  
frisbyr@staff.abanet.org

Lillian B. Gaskin  
gaskinl@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Ann Carmichael  
carmicha@staff.abanet.org

Kristi Gaines  
gainesk@staff.abanet.org

Kirra L. Jarratt  
jarratk@staff.abanet.org

E. Bruce Nicholson  
nicholsonb@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL/DIRECTOR  
GRASSROOTS OPERATIONS

Julie M. Strandlie  
jstrandlie@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL/  
DIRECTOR OF STATE LEGISLATION

Kenneth J. Goldsmith  
goldsmithk@staff.abanet.org

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY  
LAW CONSULTANT

Hayden Gregory  
gregoryh@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COORDINATOR

Jared D. Hess  
hessj@staff.abanet.org

Dear Chairman Conyers and Ranking Member Smith:

We understand the Committee may soon consider H.R. 1064, the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education (Youth PROMISE) Act. I write on behalf of the American Bar Association to urge Committee members to approve this much-needed legislation so that it may soon be considered by the full House of Representatives.

Since its introduction by Representatives Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) and Michael Castle (R-DE), H.R. 1064 has garnered remarkable support with a current list of 232 bipartisan House cosponsors. We believe its support attests to the broad recognition of the need to redirect federal policies from expensive and overbroad investment in incarceration to "smart on crime" savings through prevention. The ABA strongly supports H.R. 1064 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. Other bills that address gang violence introduced in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress would federalize ordinary street crime that should be handled at the state level and provide for enhanced penalties such as mandatory minimum sentences or juvenile life without parole, which we strongly oppose. 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 strategies proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency.

The Youth PROMISE Act directs resources towards communities facing an increased risk of crime and gang activity to enable those communities to begin to address significant unmet needs and prevent crime from occurring. Under the Youth PROMISE Act, communities facing the greatest youth gang, delinquency and crime challenges will come together – via a local council that includes law enforcement, community-based organizations, schools, faith organizations, health and social services, and mental health providers – to develop and implement a comprehensive local plan to support young people and their families and make our communities safer, reduce victimization, and help at-risk young people to lead law-abiding and healthy lives, free from gangs, delinquency and criminal involvement.

The Youth PROMISE Act provides for thorough evaluation, including analyses of the cost-savings to society yielded by investing in prevention and intervention rather than in more costly and ineffective prosecution and incarceration. Under the Youth PROMISE Act, savings from investments in prevention and intervention programs will be reinvested in prevention and intervention efforts funded under the Act.

The Youth PROMISE Act also provides for the hiring and training of Youth Oriented Policing officers to prevent and address juvenile delinquency and criminal street gang activity in a manner that is responsive to the research on juveniles and adolescent brain development. The Act's Center for Youth Oriented Policing will be responsible for identification, development, and dissemination of information related to strategic policing practices and technologies to law enforcement agencies, specifically related to the needs of young people. Additionally, the Act includes support for youth victim and witness protection programs, which are critical to addressing crime.

Finally, the Youth PROMISE Act provides for the increased local coordination of federal programs designed to reduce and prevent juvenile delinquency and youth crime, and establishes a federal commission charged to carry out a nationwide, comprehensive study of the effectiveness of crime and delinquency prevention and intervention strategies.

The Youth PROMISE Act is a critically important proposal that will keep young people out of the criminal justice system. We urge members of the Judiciary Committee to promptly approve H.R. 1064 so that it may soon be enacted into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas M. Susman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas M. Susman