

May 4, 2009

Dear Senator:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA) to urge you to cosponsor and support S. 435, the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education (Youth PROMISE) Act, bipartisan legislation sponsored by Senators Robert Casey (D-PA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME). We believe enactment of the proposed Act will be a giant step forward to redirect federal policies from expensive and overbroad investment in incarceration to “smart on crime” savings through prevention. We strongly support S. 435 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 111th 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, that 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 you to cosponsor and support S. 435 and look forward to working with you on its enactment.

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