



January 25, 2008

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Member of Congress:

As pastors and leaders of predominately African American congregations across the country, we urge you to support the Youth PROMISE Act (H.R. 3846), introduced by Representative Robert “Bobby” Scott. H.R. 3846 promises resources that will allow communities with the greatest youth gang and crime challenges to form a local council to combat these problems in community-specific ways. These councils will include representatives from law enforcement, court services, schools, social service, health and mental health providers, and community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations such as the Black churches in our network.

As religious figures we provide leadership grounded by theological interpretations of scripture and focus on issues of concern to our parishioners and our community. Gang violence in our communities is a problem. However, incarceration has become increasingly expensive and takes money away from vital social services like health care and education. Measures that seek to imprison youth instead of focusing on rehabilitation and change are not the solutions our communities require. In fact, it has been shown that prevention and intervention programs work best for our youth. An investment in quality early childhood programs, comprehensive evidence-based school, after school, and summer school programs, mentoring programs, mental health and treatment programs, evidence-based job training programs, and alternative intervention programs, have been shown to lead to decreased youth arrests, decreased delinquency, and lower recidivism. Also, prevention and intervention programs have also resulted in greater financial savings from an educational, economic, social, and criminal justice perspective.

We are optimistic that this bill can gain broad support among religious and community organizations and encourage you to show your support for evidence-based solutions to gang violence that actually work. By passing the Youth PROMISE Act, we can prevent youth involvement in the criminal justice system and strengthen communities.

Sincerely,

Rev. Timothy McDonald, III
Chair, AAMIA
Pastor, First Iconium Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA