



The U.S. Conference of Mayors
76th Annual Meeting
June 20-24, 2008
Miami

2008 ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS

COMPREHENSIVE GANG ABATEMENT LEGISLATION

WHEREAS, The U.S. Conference of Mayors previously adopted resolutions that recognize the broad range of harmful social and economic impacts that result from gang activity and endorsed comprehensive anti-gang legislation; and

WHEREAS, criminal street gangs remain a pervasive problem nationwide, and the incidence of gang-related felony crimes and violence continues to increase in urban, suburban, and rural communities; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates there are 800,000 active gang members nationwide – more than the total number of law enforcement officers; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment, published by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association, gangs account for several alarming trends in the U.S.:

- Gangs remain the primary distributors of drugs;
- Neighborhood, or home grown gangs are being found more frequently in the Northeast;
- The growth of gangs within certain communities of the South has brought increased levels of violence and crime to the region;
- In the Midwest, gang activity has increased around schools and college campuses;
- Street gangs in the West are more frequently involved in the distribution of both marijuana and methamphetamine; and

WHEREAS, between one-quarter and one-half of all homicides in major urban jurisdictions are now considered to be gang-related; and

WHEREAS, gang operations, activities, and their effects cross multiple local and state jurisdictions and cannot be adequately addressed at the local level alone, and, therefore, the federal government must take a leadership role and dedicate increased resources to this effort; and

WHEREAS, criminal justice experts and scientific research support the need for a comprehensive and balanced approach to address the continuing and changing nature of gangs and gang-related crimes, including prevention, intervention, enforcement, and ex-offender reentry strategies; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world with nearly 550 people to every 100,000 currently experiencing some form of incarceration, and a recent report by the Children's Defense Fund found that among boys born in 2001, black boys have a one in three chance of spending time in prison while white boys have a one in 17 chance, and identified poverty, a struggling education system, and an unresponsive punitive juvenile justice system as contributing factors; and

WHEREAS, the "cradle to prison pipeline" dynamic described by the Children's Defense Fund characterizes more and more youths today; and

WHEREAS, reliance on imprisoning gang members does not solve the problem since, according to the National Gang Threat Assessment, gangs often weather incarceration by organizing in jail or prison as effectively as on the street, and some youth actually are recruited to a gang affiliation while incarcerated; and

WHEREAS, an effective approach to the gang problem must include positive development for youths before they commit crimes, at a point when the choices and relationships promoting a gang lifestyle have not solidified; and

WHEREAS, prevention and intervention efforts are more cost effective than the building and maintaining of prisons since, according to the Justice Policy Institute, when a community invests one dollar in drug treatment, it will receive \$18.52 in return from reduced crime and public safety benefits - but for every dollar invested in prison, the return is only \$0.37; and

WHEREAS, some of the \$65 billion the U.S. spends each year to keep 2.2 million people incarcerated (according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics) may achieve better results if spent on prevention and intervention activities; and

WHEREAS, in addition to enforcement efforts, mayors around the country have launched successful community-based, comprehensive, anti-gang programs which include prevention and intervention activities that direct at-risk youth toward positive educational and employment opportunities; and

WHEREAS, additional federal resources are needed to supplement state and local efforts in more effectively combating criminal street gangs; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress has engaged in serious debate over the last decade on how to address the rising gang problem in our nation, but despite Senate action in 2008, still has failed to pass legislation that would support efforts to combat gang violence in our communities;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that The U.S. Conference of Mayors calls on the House of Representatives to act and Congress to immediately pass comprehensive legislation that will provide resources to cities seeking to reduce gang activity and violence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such legislation should include assistance to implement strategies that prevent and deter gang activity among at-risk youth populations, support community-based positive youth development programs, promote ex-offender reintegration to reduce gang recidivism,

provide necessary resources to law enforcement authorities, and help local governments in enforcing laws that keep communities safe from gangs;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Conference of Mayors urges Congress to address gang activity by giving greater attention to and support for evidenced-based methods proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency, such as early childhood education, home visiting for parent training, after-school mentoring, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services.

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