



May 11, 2005
(House)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

H.R. 1279 – Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act of 2005

(Rep. Forbes (R) Virginia and 15 cosponsors)

The Administration supports House passage of H.R. 1279, which would expand the coverage of Federal laws targeted at gang activities and boost the sentences available for violations of these laws. These changes would permit the increased use of Federal laws to attack the Nation's gang and violent crime problems. Aggressive law enforcement and tougher sentencing laws bear a good deal of the responsibility for the precipitous reduction in crime rates, especially for violent crime, over the past decade. The Administration believes that it is important to increase penalties for illegal gang activity, both to deter violence and encourage cooperation from gang members who are already conditioned to understand that they will do some prison time, but often cooperate when faced with heavier prison time.

The Administration has concerns with the bill's creation of new programs at the Department of Justice (DoJ) to combat violent crimes in high-intensity interstate gang activity areas and with the bill's appropriations authorization of \$77.5 million annually for each of FYs 2006-2010. The Administration believes that the gang problem will best be solved through a multi-disciplinary approach involving existing Justice programs that are focused on law enforcement and the Administration's proposed gang involvement prevention initiative at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The gang involvement prevention initiative proposed by the President will be complementary to these existing DoJ programs. This initiative, to be funded through HHS' Compassion Capital Fund in the amount of \$150 million over a period of three years, will support grants to faith-based and community organizations to provide targeted outreach to youth at risk of gang involvement and direct them to supportive social services. The Administration believes that the existing DoJ programs provide law enforcement agencies with the needed flexibility to choose the strategy that will work best against the criminal organizations in their area and that these new DoJ programs are not necessary.

We look forward to working with Congress to improve this bill as it moves through the legislative process. The Administration also looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that the criminal provisions of the bill are appropriately limited to cases in which the crime has a constitutionally sufficient link to interstate or foreign commerce.

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