

**Statement for Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Joint Hearing "Lost Educational
Opportunities in Alternative Settings."
Thursday, March 12, 2009
Rayburn 2175 at 10 am**

Good morning, I am pleased to welcome you to today's joint hearing titled "Lost Educational Opportunities in Alternative Settings" before the Committee on Education and Labor's Subcommittee on Health Families and Communities and the Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.

Among our expert witnesses today, we are joined by Dr. Cynthia Cave, Director of the Office of Student Services for the Virginia Department of Education. Dr. Cave oversees alternative education for the Department of Education in Virginia and she works closely with Virginia's bipartisan Commission on Youth to study the quality and areas for improvement in the education of at-risk youth. She has also been involved in intensive dropout prevention and truancy reduction efforts.

Today's hearing will examine the challenges associated with educating children in alternative settings and how to overcome obstacles in providing quality education in these settings. For many reasons, children in this country are educated with public funds in settings other than traditional public schools. Generally, alternative settings such as alternative schools, juvenile detention facilities and foster care settings were established with the objective of addressing children's individualized needs while educating them so that they can eventually move back to the public school system. Providing an educational setting to children when they have been suspended or expelled from their home schools is a better alternative than leaving them with them out on the street. However, we must make sure that the quality of education that young people in alternative settings is sufficient enough for them to continue on to vocational training or college. Some alternative schools settings have created positive therapeutic environments for young people and we need to learn from these model schools.

Nonetheless, it is not clear whether children who are educated in other alternative schools are being provided the educational opportunities and support they need to become successful in life. Families and educators alike are concerned that instead of addressing the individualized needs of children, these alternative schools are pushing students out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice system. The school system has become a gateway into the juvenile justice system through disciplinary policies such as "zero tolerance" that require school suspension, expulsion, and arrest for an increasing number of common student behaviors and rule violations. The National Center for Educational Statistics found that 31% of students who had been suspended three or more times before the tenth grade dropped out of school compared to only 6% of students who had never been suspended.

A growing number of the youth who are suspend or expelled are youth of color and statistics indicate that one in every 3 Black male children born today can expect to go to prison in their lifetime if current trends continue. This development led the Children's Defense Fund to conclude that many Black children are born on a "cradle to prison pipeline." We must put these children on the path to a cradle to *college* pipeline, because it is tragic and much more costly to our society in the long run, if we send these young people to prison and not to college.

The Department of Justice estimates it spends an average of almost \$25,000 per inmate per year to incarceration offenders. However, the Alliance for Excellent Education projects that increasing the high school graduation rate and college attendance for male students by only 5 percent would lead to combined savings and revenue of almost \$8 billion each year.

We know that education is the key to getting children on the right path away from a prison cell and toward a college dorm room. Without an education, statistics show that dropouts are 3 and ½ times more likely than high school graduates to be incarcerated in their lifetime.

The issue of quality education in alternative settings is especially important with the new accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act as well as mandates for student access in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). All students must have a challenging curriculum that will prepare them to pass state standardized tests and in many states allow them to graduate from high school.

Children in foster care have as many obstacles to getting a quality education as youth in the juvenile justice system. Young people in foster care often experience numerous changes in their home placements that require them to change schools frequently. Foster children have to adjust to new teachers, classmates, curricula and rules with every new home placement. These school disruptions often result in children losing academic credits, repeating grades, delaying enrollment in school and transferring of student records. I look forward to listening to the testimony from today's witnesses and hearing more about how some schools systems have overcome the challenges to providing education in alternative settings.

It is now my pleasure to recognize the esteemed ranking member of the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee, the Gentleman from Pennsylvania Todd Platts.