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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security

Hearing:

H.R. 1064, the "Youth Prison Reduction Through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention,
Support and Education Act" or the "Youth PROMISE Act"

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On Behalf of:

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Gohmert, and members of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee and present this testimony. My name is Leroy Baca. I have over 40 years' experience in law enforcement, and I have served as Sheriff of Los Angeles County, California since 1998.

I am testifying today as Chairman of the Board of Directors for FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, a national anti-crime organization of more than 5,000 sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors, attorneys general, other law enforcement leaders, and victims of violence. FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS does not run any programs, nor do we receive any federal or state funding. Rather, we take a hard-nosed look at research about what really works to keep kids from becoming criminals and we share information on what works with the public and policymakers, so we can all work together to increase public safety.

As a law enforcement leader, I know that being tough on violent crime is essential. Once a crime has been committed, however, no amount of punishment can undo the resulting damage. Jails and prisons cannot erase the agony felt by a victim, nor can they repair that victim's shattered life. It is clear to me that we cannot rely on arrest and incarceration alone to prevent or reduce crime. My colleagues and I know from the research that some of the most powerful weapons in our crime-fighting arsenal are high-quality early investments in kids that help them get the right start in life. We need to make these proven, evidence-based investments that reach kids and their families *before* they commit crimes, resulting in not only better outcomes for the kids and their families, but also greater safety for the community as a whole.

That is why my colleagues and I from FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS are proud to support the "Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act" (Youth PROMISE Act). We are grateful for Chairman Scott's leadership on this bi-partisan legislation and for the support of the 221 co-sponsors of the legislation, including a number of the members of this panel.

The current economic crisis leaves many children and teens even more vulnerable to gangs and delinquent behavior, and leaves many States, counties and cities forced to cut back on services to these kids and their families. Now more than ever, we need to provide federal investments in programs which focus on early childhood education, child abuse and neglect prevention, quality after-school activities and mentoring, and proven interventions for troubled kids. It is through these investments that we can make ensure that a turbulent economy doesn't turn into a tidal wave of crime.

The "Youth PROMISE Act" focuses federal efforts and resources towards investments which have a proven ability to reduce crime – programs which provide the necessary tools for at-risk kids to get the right start in life and to help those who start on an inappropriate path to get back on track. I want to describe for you a few of these critical investments that my colleagues and I from FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS are pleased to see that the "Youth PROMISE Act" recognizes as valuable in the fight against juvenile delinquency and gang violence.

Early Childhood Education

It is clear that children who are successful in academic pursuits are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior, including many activities associated with gang involvement such as drug use. Participation in quality early childhood education programs, including Head Start, is proven to prepare kids for school and

keep them away from crime. Studies show that Head Start participants have better self-esteem, motivation, behavior, academic achievement, and are “held back a grade” less often than similar children not in the program. In addition, research on Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers, a pre-k program similar to Head Start, showed that at-risk kids left out of the program were 70% more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than similar kids who participated. Research also shows high-quality early care and education for at-risk kids generate unparalleled returns on investment over the long term. A study of the Perry Preschool program demonstrated that it saved taxpayers more than \$16 for every \$1 invested as a result of the tremendous cuts in crime, welfare dependence, and other costs.

Evidence-Based Home Visiting Programs

Investments in the prevention of child abuse and neglect can have a powerful impact on reducing crime. In 2007, there were 794,000 confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in the United States. This statistic is alarming enough on its own, but it cannot account for the thousands of additional cases that either go unreported or unconfirmed by overburdened State child welfare agencies. Research shows the true number of victims nationwide, including those never reported to authorities, may be well over 2 million.

Even though the majority of children who survive abuse or neglect do not become violent criminals, these children carry the emotional scars of maltreatment for life. Not only are they more likely to inflict similar abuse or neglect upon their own children, but also many do go on to commit violent crimes. The best available research indicates that, based on the confirmed cases of abuse and neglect nationwide in just one year, an additional 30,000 children will become violent criminals and 200 will become murderers as adults as a direct result of the abuse and neglect they endured.

Fortunately, evidence-based home visiting programs can prevent abuse and neglect and reduce later crime and violence. There are a variety of models for these visitation programs, though all are dedicated to helping young children get a good start in life and improving outcomes for the entire family. The programs are generally characterized by frequent, voluntary home visits by trained individuals, from nurses to social workers to other trained para-professionals, to help parents get the information, skills, and support they need to raise healthy and safe kids.

The research is clear that these home visitation programs work. For example, one program that we have in L.A. County, the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), randomly assigned interested at-risk pregnant women to receive visits by nurses starting before the birth of a first child and continuing until the child was age two. Rigorous research, originally published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, shows the program cut abuse and neglect among at-risk kids nearly in half. In addition, children of mothers who received the coaching had 60% fewer arrests by age 15 than the children of mothers who were not coached. Many other programs have shown positive outcomes as well.

Not only do these programs result in less child abuse and neglect and help reduce crime, but they also result in tremendous cost savings. A study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that NFP produced \$18,000 in net savings per family served and saved \$3 for every \$1 invested. Some other models of home visiting have also resulted in cost savings.

After-School Programs and Mentoring

For many families, while the parents are at work, kids are left unsupervised after school. High-quality after-school programs connect kids to caring adults and provide constructive activities between 3pm and 6pm on school days – the prime time for juvenile crime. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department already offers the second largest youth activity program in the nation, managing 14 Youth Activity Leagues serving at-risk youth in after-school programs involving academics, sports, and cultural arts. High-quality after school programs have been proven by research to have an impact on crime. For example, a study compared five housing projects without Boys & Girls Clubs to five receiving new clubs. Although both had similar rates of drug activity and vandalism in the beginning, by the study's end, the housing projects without the programs experienced 50 percent more vandalism and scored 37 percent worse on drug activity.

A study of Big Brothers Big Sisters demonstrated that quality mentoring programs also help at-risk youth avoid criminal activity. The study found that young people who were randomly assigned to a Big Brother or Big Sister mentor were about half as likely to begin illegal drug use and nearly one-third less likely to hit someone compared to those who were assigned to a waiting list.

Interventions for Troubled Youth

Current data regarding children and mental health presents an alarming picture: at least one in ten children suffers from a serious mental health problem. An even greater proportion of children and youth from low-income families are at-risk for mental health problems: 21% of low-income children and youth ages 6 through 17 have mental health problems. Sadly, 75% to 80% of children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them. This is not only a problem for these kids – it is a serious problem for our communities because mental health is inexorably linked to public safety. Although not all youth with untreated mental health problems become criminals, youth with untreated mental health needs are more likely to get in trouble.

It is essential to treat behavioral and emotional problems and mental illness while children are young in order to prevent more serious problems later on. Researchers have estimated that 7% or more of preschoolers have levels of disruptive, aggressive behaviors severe enough to qualify for mental health diagnosis. Of these children, approximately 60% will later manifest high levels of antisocial and delinquent behavior. One scientifically designed and tested evidenced-based early screening and treatment approach for young children with emotional and behavioral problems is called The Incredible Years. A study of the approach, which includes components not only for the kids, but also for the parents and teachers as well, found that when both the young children and their parents received services, 95 percent of the children experience significant reductions in problem behaviors.

School-based approaches such as the Good Behavior Game and the Life Skills Training program produce long-term results. The Good Behavior Game, a classroom exercise for young children and teenagers, creates a simple reward system whereby students are divided into two or more groups in the classroom (with equal numbers of misbehaving children) and the groups compete to behave well. Teachers make check marks for the children in each group who act out and simple rewards, such as getting to line up first for the playground, are awarded to the winning group. A long-term randomized study of Baltimore first-graders followed the children to age 19-21 and found a 50 percent lower dependence on drugs for those who participated. Another school-based approach, Life Skills Training, is a three-year intervention

designed to prevent or reduce gateway drug use. The program has been shown to cut tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use by 50 to 75 percent.

Many older troubled youth who have begun to commit criminal offenses need to participate in evidence-based, intensive individual and family therapy programs to help steer them back to a path of success in the community. There are a number of therapeutic interventions with remarkable outcomes in reducing juvenile recidivism. These interventions work individually with kids to change their actions and parents to equip them to better manage their children's behavior. It is exactly this type of community-based approach to solving delinquency (and gang violence) issues that the "Youth PROMISE Act" seeks to promote.

The success of some of these therapeutic interventions cannot be overlooked by anyone searching for ways in which to address criminal activity by juveniles – and looking for ways to save money. For example, a study of one approach called Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, showed that the program cut the average number of repeat arrests for seriously delinquent juveniles in half, saving an average of over \$77,000 for every juvenile treated. Similarly, a study of youth who participated in a program called Functional Family Therapy found that participants were half as likely to be re-arrested as the youth whose families did not receive the family therapy, saving an average of \$32,000 per youth treated. Kids not receiving these critical interventions do not fare nearly as well. A study of one program, Multi-Systemic Therapy, found that similar juvenile offenders who had *not* received services under the program were 62 percent more likely to have been arrested for an offense, and more than twice as likely to be arrested for a violent offense. As a result, the public saved over \$4.25 for every dollar invested in the program.

The Youth PROMISE Act

I have described a number of investments in kids that have proven ability to reduce crime and violence. Unfortunately, woefully inadequate funding leaves millions of children at risk of becoming delinquent teens and adult criminals. The Nurse Family Partnership, for example, is only able to provide home visiting services to about 20,000 of the half-million at-risk new mothers annually. Head Start is only able to serve about half of eligible three-and-four-year olds. More than 14 million children still lack constructive adult supervision after school. Effective interventions for delinquent youth reach only a fraction of the troubled kids who would benefit from them.

The "Youth PROMISE Act" focuses federal investments on approaches that have been shown to be effective in reducing crime, especially juvenile delinquency. It helps communities develop and implement plans, specific to their individual needs and strengths, which utilize evidence-based prevention and intervention approaches like those I've already discussed to reduce the likelihood of a young person joining a gang and/or engaging in delinquent activity. We are extremely supportive of the legislation's approach of data-driven targeting of federal resources to communities in which the need for services is the greatest

We are also pleased to see the emphasis on additional funding and research to identify other innovative crime prevention or intervention strategies. It is this emphasis on preventing criminal activity through investments in proven strategies targeting kids early that my colleagues and I at FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS are proud to support.

As a law enforcement leader with more than 40 years of experience, I know from the front lines in the fight against crime—and the research—that quality early investments in kids are among the most powerful weapons we have in our crime-fighting arsenal. The time to make these investments is now, so that we can reach our most vulnerable kids before it is too late. In doing so, we will go a long way towards not only improving the outcomes for these kids and their families, but also in improving the safety and security of our communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.