



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Bonamici (OR-01)

Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services

An Ounce of Prevention: Investments in Juvenile Justice Programs

Zoom

Thursday, September 8, 2022 | 12:00 p.m.

Today, we are meeting to discuss the need to invest in prevention to keep young people out of the justice system and on a path to success.

Research shows that in recent decades, our communities have seen a steady decline in violence among young people. But unfortunately, too many juveniles continue to come in contact with formal court systems where they face detention or incarceration. And unfortunately, these systems are poorly equipped to address delinquency and they actually increase the chances of recidivism. This is especially true for youth of color. Black and Brown youth are gravely overrepresented in juvenile courts compared to white youth.

Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth also face disproportionate rates of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Research shows that youth who identify as LGBTQ are twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to be arrested and detained for nonviolent offenses.

Although the juvenile justice system is intended to rehabilitate—not punish—young offenders, data shows that the more a young person interacts with the juvenile justice system, the more likely they are to reenter the system and struggle throughout life. I'm going to say that again. The juvenile justice system is intended to rehabilitate—not punish—young offenders, data shows that the more a young person interacts with the juvenile justice system, the more likely they are to reenter the system and struggle throughout life. That bears repeating.

We know these outcomes can be avoided. With evidence-based prevention and intervention initiatives, we can limit juveniles' exposure to the system and effectively and efficiently address and reduce delinquency, recidivism, and crime overall. And that is why Congress established grant funding to help states and localities prioritize prevention and intervention through the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act*, or JJDPA.

Prevention initiatives—like afterschool programs, bullying prevention programs, and mentorship programs—help keep young people out of the juvenile justice system and reduce both adult criminal careers and the likelihood of serious and violent offenses. This, in turn, can reduce the burden of crime on our society and save taxpayers billions of dollars.

For example, in Multnomah County in my home state of Oregon, like in many places across the country, youth of color experience exclusionary school discipline, disconnection from school, and a lack of educational attainment at disproportionate rates. One program that's helping to reduce violence is the Community Healing Initiative. This partnership of Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center, Rosemary Anderson High School, Latino Network, and Multnomah County. It focuses on reducing the disparities faced by youth of color in the juvenile justice system through culturally-appropriate services and workforce opportunities. The Community Healing Initiative works to eliminate disparities at the point of law enforcement involvement through its range of

intervention and prevention programming, including risk and needs assessment, needed services referral, and resources for gang violence affected youth and families.

Simply put, prevention programs are proven to help youth lead meaningful lives outside of the justice system and they also save taxpayer dollars.

We know, however, that prevention programs do not eliminate *all* delinquent activity. When youth do engage with the justice system, it is critical that they are cared for holistically.

To that end, intervention programs—like workforce development training, mental health treatment, and drug courts—seek to redirect offenders from the juvenile justice system without removing them from their existing support structures, school, and family.

By allowing youth to receive the support they need without generating an early record, these initiatives help young people stay out of the system, succeed in school, and—ultimately—avoid delinquency.

In addition to better serving justice-involved youth, intervention programs help cut the cost of the juvenile justice system by redirecting young people out of the system and into community services. Billions of dollars – and futures - would be saved if even a fraction of eligible youth were rerouted into these programs.

Despite the clear benefits of prevention and intervention initiatives, Congress has generally underfunded these programs under JJDPA—limiting their capacity to serve our youth and communities. Despite resource constraints, Congress has recognized the need to enhance crime prevention programming nationally. Under Chairman Scott's leadership, Congress included funding for evidence-based programs that are designed to reduce juvenile delinquency—known as Youth PROMISE grants—in the last bipartisan reauthorization of the JJDPA.

If we are serious about supporting our nation's young people, we must provide full funding for evidence-based prevention and intervention programs that will keep them on a path to success.

Our commitment to supporting young Americans and those in the juvenile justice system must be treated with the urgency this important issue demands.

Thank you, again, to our witnesses and I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to invest in the future of our children and communities.