

**Remarks of Ranking Member Bobby Scott
Committee Mark-up of HR 1808 and 1809
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Tuesday, April 4, 2017 - 10:00 am**

OPENING REMARKS

Madame Chairwoman, thank you for your leadership in bringing two important and bipartisan measures before the committee today. I would also like to thank Representatives Courtney and Guthrie for working together to craft H.R. 1808, which makes needed updates to the Missing Children's Assistance Act. And I would like to thank Representative Lewis and others on the committee for working with me to address long-needed juvenile justice reform through H.R. 1809, a comprehensive and common-sense reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

H.R. 1808, the Improving Support for Missing and Exploited Children Act, and H.R. 1809, the Juvenile Justice Reform Act both work to help

children who find themselves in tough circumstances, especially those who are most vulnerable, like foster and homeless youth.

H.R.1808 follows the bipartisan history of Congress to ensure private and public entities are able to partner and coordinate with each other to rescue missing and exploited children.

H.R. 1809, The Juvenile Justice Reform Act, builds on this Committee's success during the 114th Congress to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice, Delinquency, and Prevent Act (JJDP) and includes important updates grounded in evidence of what we know works to better support young people and prevent them from coming into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Juvenile courts were established by states in the first half of the 20th Century on the emerging legal theory that children should not be held

fully responsible for their actions, a theory borne out over time by scientific research into impulse control and brain development. The capacity to rehabilitate children, rather than the punishment of offenders, rightfully became the focus of the juvenile system. Unfortunately, over time the focus on prevention decreased and in many states, juvenile facilities essentially became jails for children.

Congress first articulated national standards of juvenile justice in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, or JJDP Act in recognition of the federal role in protecting children. Long overdue for reauthorization, JJDP Act creates the federal guardrails that protect our children in the juvenile justice systems in each state. In the 14 years since Congress last reauthorized the program, there have been advancements in research and an expansion of evidence when it comes to the prevention of youth incarceration and delinquency.

H.R. 1809 includes necessary improvements to federal policy firmly grounded in facts, proving that public investments in a continuum of trauma-informed care and alternatives to incarceration and secure detention produce positive results for at-risk youth that lead to reduced crime and long-term savings.

H.R. 1809 would require state juvenile justice plans to take into account the latest scientific research on adolescent development and behavior, recognizing the importance of prevention and early intervention in juvenile crime policy. We shouldn't have to legislate this, but we have often seen that slogans and soundbites have dictated our nation's approach to crime policy – even juvenile crime. These slogans and soundbites often do nothing to decrease crime, and in fact, when studied, have been shown to actually increase crime.

Today's markup is an important step in the growing bipartisan movement for real justice reform. I am particularly pleased with updates

to the four core requirements, including phase out of the valid court order, or VCO, exemption.

H.R. 1809 also encourages states to consider promising practices such as programming to ensure youth access to public defenders with juvenile court experience, the use of “problem-solving courts” as an alternative to probation and confinement, efforts to inform and aid juveniles in the process of sealing and expunging their juvenile records, and programming to address the needs of girls in or at risk of entering the system when developing state plans.

And lastly, the bill retools the current law Title V Local Delinquency Prevention Grant program, retitled as the Youth Promise Incentive Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Program to support communities in the planning and implementation of evidence-based prevention and intervention programs specifically designed to reduce juvenile and delinquency and gang involvement.

Grant recipients would be required to analyze the unmet delinquency prevention needs of youth in the community, then develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to address those unmet needs with an emphasis on program coordination. Research shows that a community-wide, coordinated approach to delinquency prevention that utilizes a continuum of services can actually save the community money and improve efficiencies.

I'd like to especially thank Rep. Lewis and my committee colleagues for working with me on the Title V provisions, which are modeled after a bill I've been working on for nearly ten years– The Youth P.R.O.M.I.S.E. Act. I am confident that, if enacted, this incentive grant program will vastly improve the lives of – and long-term economic opportunity for – at-risk youth across the country.

A central mission of my career in public service has been to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. While in the Virginia legislature, the

House Judiciary Committee, and now as Ranking Member of this Committee, I have worked to elevate issues of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention and the integration of those efforts with educational and workforce systems.

In closing, I want to say that today's committee action – and the collaborative work of this committee on H.R. 1808 and 1809 – gives me hope that we can get a full JJDPa reauthorization and improvements to NCMEC over the finish line this Congress.

I urge my colleagues to vote yes on both bills and I yield back.