

7/12/2016

The Honorable Robert W. Goodlatte
Chair, Judiciary Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Conyers
Ranking Member, Judiciary Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Sessenbrenner
Chair, Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security
Homeland And Investigations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee
Ranking Member, Crime, Terrorism,
Security and Investigations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As your committee deliberates the many dimensions of criminal justice system improvements and reforms, I write to encourage your strong support for H.R. 68, the “Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Reauthorization and the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Act of 2015”. This updated and critically important legislation incorporates evidence-based, research-supported purpose areas significantly improving the Act. It has been shaped to help future federal program dollar recipients (via this Act) become much more effective as they incorporate a broader range of graduated sanctions and incentives geared toward holding youths accountable for problem behaviors. H.R. 68 substantially emphasizes the importance of aligning program / purpose areas with child and adolescent developmental research. It heightens an intentional focus on balancing public safety with intervening early and appropriately with a sensitivity to issues including the impacts of trauma, bullying and cyber-bullying, mental health / substance abuse challenges among other problems. And it still includes a wide array of retributive responses where needed.

Research teaches us that focusing only on punishment when youth are alleged to have committed crimes can in fact make them more prone to engage in future criminal actions. And untreated trauma or system-created impacts (e.g., inappropriate or ineffective interventions) dramatically increase risks of poor behavioral, emotional and criminal justice outcomes. The Amended Revisions show a clarity of purpose and thinking that really strengthen the overall legislation. Professionals from across the board including judges, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, public defenders, and advocates will support that creating an accountability system geared toward skill-building, victim restoration, teaching and maintaining prosocial behaviors and responses makes much more sense than relying on a juvenile justice system which tends to mirror the adult criminal justice system in purpose and service delivery structure.

The \$25,000,000 proposed appropriation is a difference-making level of support and would substantially assist states. Since the JABG expired in 2013, states have experienced serious erosions of juvenile justice services. H.R. 68 in its much improved form affords vital opportunities. Services that would be funded *are not supplemental to other federal appropriations or Acts*. H.R. 68 would shore up eroded juvenile justice systems and move them in much-needed, research supported directions. This predicts greater accountability, better public safety, and stronger evidence-based policy. Thank you so much for considering my thoughts on this matter. As a long-time juvenile justice system leader, criminal justice researcher, program and agency administrator I honestly believe that this is an improved piece of legislation.

With sincere appreciation for your leadership,



Robert (Robin) Jenkins, PhD

- Assistant Professor, Methodist University
- Independent Consultant, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems