

Testimony of
The Honorable Barbara Boxer

United States Senator
California
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Statement for the Record by Senator Barbara Boxer
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
The Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2007, S.456
June 5, 2006

Good morning and thank you, Madame Chair, for the privilege of participating in this important hearing.

I commend you for your hard work and leadership on this issue for all these years, and I am proud to join as a co-sponsor of your bill. I am proud to join because this bill is balanced between punishment and prevention, and will bring much needed help to beleaguered communities.

I also want to welcome my good friends from Los Angeles - Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Chief William Bratton. Both the Mayor and the Chief have worked tirelessly on the issue before us today - gang violence. They confront it every day, and we deeply appreciate their hard work and efforts. We are here today because we want to help them in their efforts.

Those of us from California - Madame Chair, the Mayor, the Chief and I - know all too well, unfortunately, the damage that gang violence has done to our communities and our families, particularly our children.

I want to tell you a very sad story that catapulted me into action.

On November 13, 2005, 11-year old Mynisha Crenshaw sat down to have dinner with her 14-year old sister and their family in their San Bernardino, California apartment building. A gang-related dispute broke out and gunfire sprayed the apartment building, killing young Mynisha and seriously wounding her 14-year old sister.

Imagine the fear and anguish the family and the community felt because of this tragedy - a young girl, full of hope and promise, dead because of senseless violence. Her big sister, wounded from the same gunfire, thankfully recovered.

Imagine the fear, though, in the community that something like this could happen again. And just four months later, it did - two men were killed in gang-related crossfire in downtown San Bernardino.

In response to the shootings, I, along with Senator Feinstein, introduced a bill called Mynisha's Law. Under Mynisha's Law, an interagency task force - comprised of the Depts. of Justice, Education, Labor, HHS and HUD - would be responsible for identifying and coordinating comprehensive gang prevention and intervention resources to high intensity gang areas.

Today, I am pleased to announce that provisions of Mynisha's Law have been incorporated into the Gang Abatement Act.

One provision places an interagency task force in each high intensity gang area so that each area will have access to comprehensive prevention and intervention resources from a variety of sources.

For example, a high intensity gang area could receive assistance in the form of 21st Century Learning Centers from the Dept. of Education. The Mayor, Senator Feinstein and I all have been big supporters of this program.

A high intensity gang area could also receive grants from the Office of Community Services under the Dept. of Health & Human Services to build community-based youth empowerment programs. Or a high intensity gang area could receive assistance from the Job Corps program under the Dept. of Labor.

The point is that we will now be able to bring a variety of resources to assist communities suffering from gang violence.

The second provision is a reporting requirement that will ensure that the needs of each jurisdiction are considered by the President and Congress during the budget process.

Each high intensity gang area is required to report whether federal resources are meeting the needs of the jurisdiction - if not, then specific recommendations to address shortfalls are required. Annual reports from each jurisdiction will be distributed not only to Congress, but also to the Director of the Office of Management & Budget and the National Domestic Policy Council.

Again, Madame Chair, I want to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your efforts on the important issue of gang violence.

Gang violence affects communities, families and children all across America - it is a waste of life; it is unacceptable.

Madame Chair, you have laid out the crisis in your opening statements. Your bill, S.456, the Gang Abatement Act, goes a long way toward creating an effective federal, state and local partnership to combat gang violence.

The bill provides new tools and strong penalties to help bring gang criminals to justice. The bill also provides additional resources to enhance information sharing and coordination between federal, state and local law enforcement authorities.

The Gang Abatement Act commits significant and substantial resources - hundreds of millions of dollars - to communities for gang prevention and intervention. This is an important commitment by the federal government to provide stable long-term gang prevention and intervention resources to communities in need, as well as tough penalties aimed at ruthless gangs.

In closing, I want to again thank the Chair, Senator Hatch, Mayor Villaraigosa and Chief Bratton for their hard work and dedication in addressing the issue of gang violence. I would also like to thank Chairman Leahy and the Judiciary Committee for the privilege of appearing here today to participate in this important hearing. I look forward to seeing S.456, the Gang Abatement Act, come to the floor of the Senate soon for a vote.