

New York State Senator

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19th Senate District



Reporting to the
19th Senate District

PREVENTING GANG VIOLENCE

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Dear Friends:

It has become more apparent that we are plagued by the problem of gang violence in our neighborhoods and schools. Incidents of violence and graffiti vandalism have increased. The threat to our community, our schools and especially our children is clear. Gangs commit violent crimes against each other and innocent citizens alike. They deal drugs in our neighborhoods and schools. In some cases they make our children afraid to attend school or go outside and play. The time has come to put an end to gang violence and activity in our community. Gangs know there is strength in numbers. We should apply this same principle to act as a whole community to stop gangs in our schools and neighborhoods. If we act together we can make our neighborhoods and schools safe places to live, work, learn and play. This pamphlet is part of that effort. We must come to recognize the signs of gang activity in the community and in the home. The more we learn about gangs, the better we will be prepared to deal with them effectively and to prevent our children from being involved with them.

To parents of gang members and members of communities plagued by gang violence and activities I ask that you do not give up hope. Your child or children can get out of the gangs. They can be saved. We in the State Legislature are aware of the gang problem throughout the state. We are working on solutions to this complex and difficult issue.

To the children in our communities I ask that you also have hope. Stay in school. Don't be pressured to join a gang. Gang activities are not "cool"; they are foolish and dangerous. Joining a gang will get you arrested, hurt or killed. Gangs say that they are a "family," but this is not so. Gangs frequently commit acts of violence against their own members. There is no real love or family within the ranks of a gang.

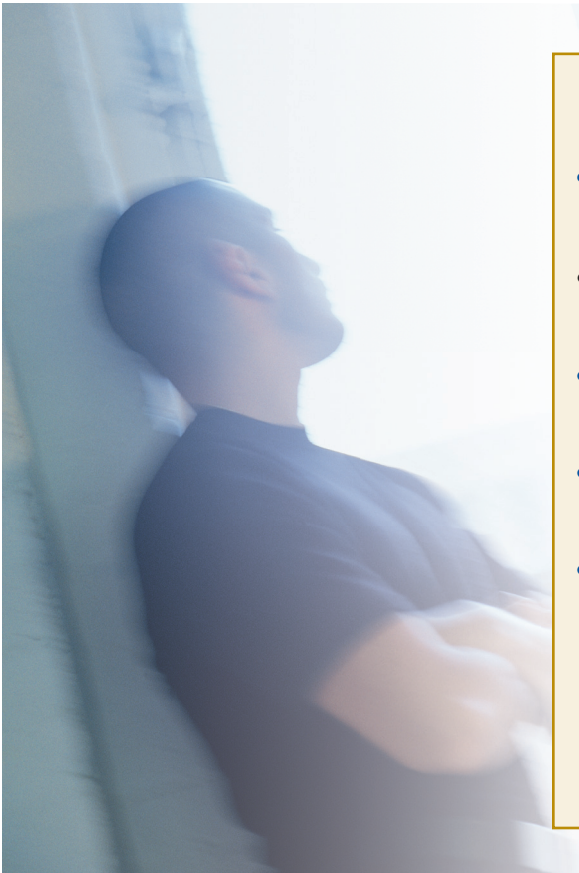
To gang members themselves I say that your activities are destroying your lives and the lives of those who truly care about you. Gang violence is just one child against another. For what? Colors? Graffiti? Something you or someone else writes on a wall is not worth your life. Once you take someone else's life, it can never be restored. You can get out of a gang. Your family, church and community can help you. If you are afraid to leave the gang, ask yourself why you risk death, injury or imprisonment for people you are afraid of. Being afraid of your friends and your rivals is no way to live. We as a community still care about you and your future. We simply don't accept your gang activity.

As always, it is a privilege serving as your Senate advocate here in our State Capitol.

Senator Roxanne J. Persaud

Signs That Your Child May Be In A Street Gang Or Involved In Street Gang Activities

- Your child may admit to being in a gang or involved with gang members.
- He or she may wear excessive amounts of clothing in two color combinations, such as blue and black or gold and black. Your child may also wear the same color clothing all the time.
- Wearing gold or silver pendants and rings with the shapes of dollar signs, automatic guns or crowns, etc.
- Wearing bead necklaces. This is a popular fad among teenagers, but it could also indicate gang affiliation or membership especially when the beads are worn in certain color combinations such as red and black or black and yellow.
- Tattoos or cigarette burn marks on his or her body especially three burn marks together.
- Possession of box cutters. Box cutters are the weapon of choice among many gang members in New York today.
- Using gang slang in everyday conversation.
- Using hand signs or signals.
- Too much secrecy, or your child refusing to tell you where he or she is going or with whom.
- Your son or daughter not wanting you to meet their “new friends”.
- Your son or daughter having large amounts of unexplained cash.
- Exact matches in clothing among friends your child hangs out with.
- Gang graffiti written on books, clothing or even inside the brim of a baseball cap.
- Dyeing or coloring the inside of pants pockets.
- Your son or daughter habitually crosses out certain letters in their writing, especially Bs or Cs.
- A sudden drop in school performance and/or attendance.
- Watch where your son or daughter hangs out. Is there gang graffiti? This could indicate gang affiliation or association with gang members. If you are not sure what graffiti means or whether it is gang graffiti, ask a police officer or ask at your local police precinct.
- Watch what your child accesses on the Internet. Is he or she accessing gang web sites? This could indicate gang affiliation or an interest in gangs.
- Your son or daughter’s nickname could indicate gang involvement. If you are not sure what your child’s nickname means, ask a police officer or ask at your local police precinct.



What To Do If Your Child Is In A Street Gang

- Tell them you will not tolerate any gang language, gang clothing, gang friends, etc. in your home.
- Adopt a zero tolerance approach. Stand firm. Tell them you love them but do not approve of their gang activity or gang associations.
- Voice the dangers of gang life to them. These dangers include being hurt or killed or being incarcerated.
- Ask them if they want to leave the gang. Keep asking. Leave the lines of communication open.
- Resist the urge to put them out of your home unless absolutely necessary. Gangs usually stress that they are a member’s family and that the gang loves them. Kicking your child out of the home may lead your child to believe that the gang is his or her true family. You should stress that violence among members of the same gang is commonplace. This is not family.

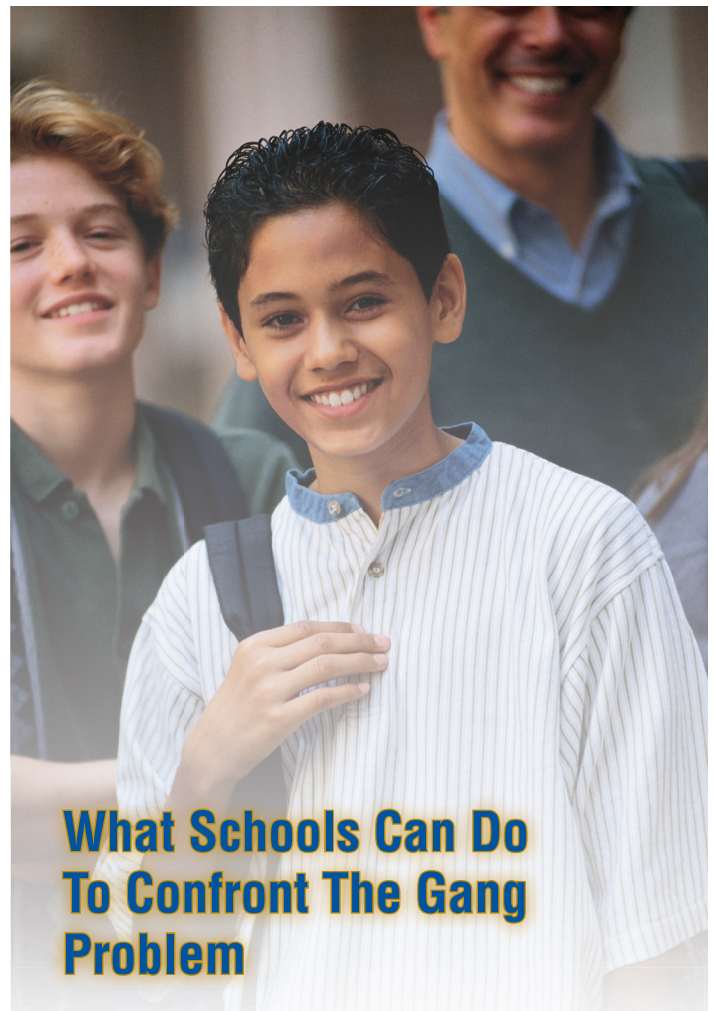
Steps Parents Can Take To Prevent Gang Involvement

- Impress upon your child the importance of school and good grades.
- Listen to your children. Communicate with them about their fears and concerns.
- Discuss the consequences of being in a gang.
- Involve your child in family and outside activities. Children who have a lot of unstructured free time on their hands are prime material for gang recruitment. Ask your family for help. Uncles, aunts, or grandparents can all help to provide structured time for your child. Single parents or parents who do not have a large family to rely on can try to get their child involved with after school academic programs or local organizations, such as the YMCA or a Big Brothers/Big Sisters program in your area.
- Take an active interest in your child's schooling and academic progress.
- Praise your children for their positive accomplishments such as getting good grades, doing their homework, doing well in sports or simply for staying out of trouble.
- Tell your children you love them. Gangs stress that they are a child's family and that they love your child. Show them that YOU are their family and that YOU love them the most.



Gangs In America And In New York

According to the National Youth Gang Center, there are 28,000 gangs in the United States with a total membership of over 770,000. Some believe that this estimate may be conservative and that there may actually be between 850,000-950,000 gang members in the United States. There are over 17,000 identified gang members in the City of New York.



What Schools Can Do To Confront The Gang Problem

- School administrators, principals and teachers should not tolerate gang activity of any kind on campus. This zero tolerance approach has led some schools to ban certain clothing, pagers, hand signals, etc. on campus or to close campuses.
- School officials must honestly evaluate whether or not they have a gang problem or presence on campus. School officials who deny that gangs operate on their campus only allow the problem to flourish. The longer gangs can operate in schools unmolested by school administration, the more time they have to recruit new members, intimidate students and staff, conduct drug sales or other crimes or commit acts of violence.
- School officials and staff should become more knowledgeable about gangs in order to recognize signs of gang presence on campus.
- School administrations should form partnerships with local police. This arrangement benefits both parties because police can help with enforcement efforts in the schools, and police may gain valuable knowledge about gang activity and associations from intelligence provided by school personnel.

Gang Graffiti

Gang graffiti is not meaningless. It is much more than just an eyesore. It is the “newspaper of the streets”. Gangs use graffiti to express their control over an area or neighborhood. They also use it to warn, threaten, or “dis”(disrespect) their rivals. When gang graffiti is crossed out or marked over by rivals, it is a serious sign of disrespect that frequently leads to acts of retaliation including violence. Gang graffiti can be dangerous to people who live within territory

marked with it because it may lead rival gangs to mistake innocent neighborhood residents for gang members simply because they live in an area marked by graffiti. Individuals living in gang neighborhoods should be warned not to attempt to remove graffiti themselves. This could lead to violent retaliation by gang members.



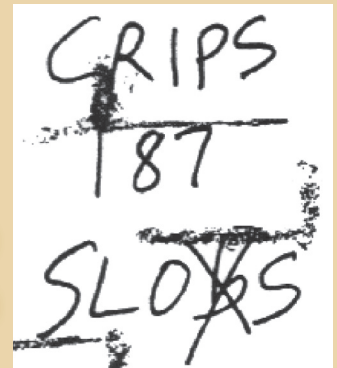
Here is an example of graffiti by the Crips street gang. Note the S's drawn in the form of dollar signs. This graffiti was found in the Kings County Courthouse.

"Image courtesy of the East Coast Gang Investigators Association"



Here is an example of graffiti from the Latin Kings street gang.

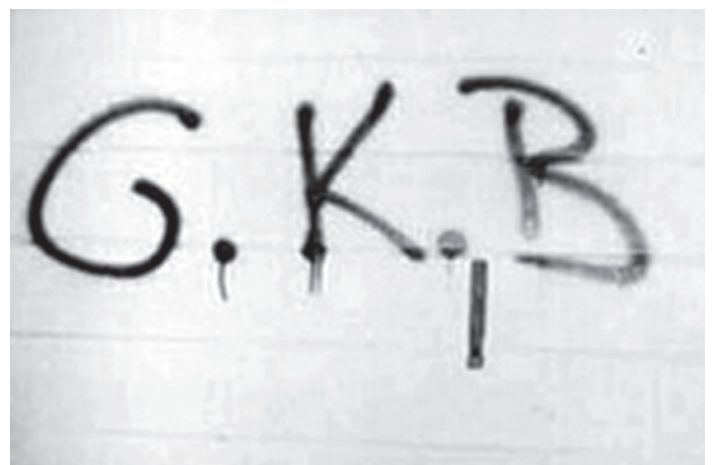
Here is an example of graffiti by the Crips street gang. The number "187" is a reference to the California Penal Code section for murder. The term "slobs" is the derogatory name that the Crips call their rivals the Bloods. Thus, this graffiti is a threat that Crips will murder Bloods.



This is an example of graffiti from the MS13 street gang. "MS" stands for "Mara Salvatrucha." This graffiti does not appear to say anything but look closely. You will see a large "13," the numbers also form the letter "M." The three dots stand for "Mi vida loca" which means "My crazy life."



"Image courtesy of the East Coast Gang Investigators Association"



This is an example of graffiti from the Bloods street gang. The initials "G.K.B." stands for "Gangsta Killa Bloods." This graffiti was found on a building in Brooklyn.

"Image courtesy of the East Coast Gang Investigators Association"