



A November 2007 reception at Children's Defense Fund asked,

What can be done to stop the current cycle of violence and incarceration and ensure that America's children thrive?

Co-hosted by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Children's Defense Fund, the Harvard School of Public Health, the UCLA School of Public Health, and Prevention Institute, the reception proved to be a gathering of leaders with a call for prevention.

A Gathering of Leaders

We were pleased to welcome Congressman Bobby Scott of Virginia, who underscored the need for prevention of violence and insisted that we fund alternatives to the current system which emphasizes punitive measures and incarceration. In addition, the event drew congressional staff; city representatives; grassroots & community-based organizations; researchers; representatives from federal agencies; justice and public health organizations; statewide organizations and national organizations such as National League of Cities, National Association of City and County Health Officials, and the National Crime Prevention Council.



Special guests Representative Bobby Scott and Dr. Rodney Hammond (CDC) with Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith (Harvard School of Public Health)

A Call for Prevention

The overwhelming theme from speakers & participants was a call to action for prevention. Dr. Rodney Hammond, Director of the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), warned about data trends that look like violence rates are on the rise and that cities and young people, particularly youth of color, are disproportionately affected. He said that CDC is committed to supporting cities in addressing

the problem before we return to the epidemic levels of the late 1980s and early '90s.

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Henry Pickering Walcott Professor of the Practice of Public Health and Associate Dean for Diversity at Harvard School of Public Health, underscored that we know what to do to prevent violence but that we must prioritize it, particularly "up front" strategies, those that are in place to prevent violence



Reception guests listen to speakers



before it occurs. She introduced UNITY (Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth), a national initiative to support cities and build national momentum for prevention, and encouraged those in attendance to join the growing effort.

MaryLee Allen, Director of the Child Welfare and Mental Health Division at Children's Defense Fund (CDF), presented compelling data about the risk of children of color entering the prison system and urged that we can and must address this disturbing reality. She shared the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* report recently



MaryLee Allen (Children's Defense Fund) talks about America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis.

published by CDF and provided copies of this important document. She encouraged participants to name the Pipeline and work together for policy shifts that provide more support and opportunities for the youngest members of society, such as ensuring that every child can read by the 4th grade.

Dr. Elsie Scott, President of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, challenged everyone present and the nation at large to put our

brilliant minds together and find solutions to reduce violence and incarceration. She also shared that the Caucus Membership is highly concerned about violence, and talked about connecting their work with UNITY as they move forward.



Co-hosts Billie Weiss (UCLA School of Public Health), Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith (Harvard School of Public) and Larry Cohen (Prevention Institute)



Co-host Dr. Elsie Scott (Congressional Black Caucus Foundation) listens in with Deane Calhoun (Youth ALIVE!)



Looking ahead to the next generation: reception guests Michele Silver (Public Health Institute), Xan Young (Suicide Prevention Resource Center) and Xan's son.

An Ongoing Effort

Overall, the reception underscored a serious problem affecting young people today. It also highlighted a number of solutions and new opportunities to work together and create synergy to ensure that young people are given the opportunities they need to thrive.

For more information about:

UNITY (*Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth*):
www.preventioninstitute.org/UNITY.html or contact Rachel Davis, Project Director at Rachel@preventioninstitute.org

The Cradle to Prison Pipeline:

www.childrensdefense.org/c2pp
 or contact Natacha Blain at nblain@childrensdefense.org