By Peggy Hanna
Contributing Writer

Last Friday’s Community Commentary column entitled “Springfield Promise Responds to Violence” by Bob Welker urges us to act to stop the violence. Every single step toward peace builds toward changing our culture from one of violence to peace. In addition to his suggestions, I believe one giant step would be overhauling our justice system.

The Clark County Peace Alliance is working for passage of the Youth PROMISE Act as a way to reduce youth violence, make communities safer and save money. PROMISE stands for Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support and Education. This bill and four other bills will work together to make the changes that our country needs to address the problems and injustices of a failing criminal justice system — perpetuating the violence instead of reducing it.

The need for reform is beyond debate. Statistics about U.S. incarceration underscore the failure of the “tough on crime” movement. The United States has the highest prison population rate in the world: 716 per 100,000 people. We have almost 25 percent of the world’s prison population but less than 5 percent of the world population. Together the following five pieces of legislation will go a long way to solve the current crisis and in the long run, reduce violence.

• **Youth PROMISE Act:** The Youth PROMISE Act would reduce youth violence by enabling inclusive groups of local stakeholders to determine the needs of their own communities and to address those needs with a suite of accountable, evidence-based programs for prevention and intervention. It’s locally controlled, accountable, saves money and will significantly reduce youth incarceration.

• **SAFE Justice Act:** The SAFE Justice Act is the product of a two-year-long bipartisan process to create a broad and comprehensive reform of the criminal justice system. Among other things, it allows judges and defendants relief from mandatory minimums, and reforms probation to make it more supportive and less punitive, helping people reintegrate into
the community.

**Second Chance Re-authorization Act:** The Second Chance Act was first passed in 2007 and has used evidence-based reentry programs to help those returning from incarceration reintegrate into the community. It has reduced recidivism and saved significant amounts of money.

**Smarter Sentencing Act:** The Smarter Sentencing Act would reduce a variety of mandatory minimums to reduce unjustifiable disparities in sentencing and to reduce sentences for low risk offenders.

**Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Re-authorization:** JJDPA, passed in 1974, sets national standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system. A decade of evidence proves that treatment-focused, community-based approaches work. They are cost-effective and result in better outcomes for kids and communities. Take one small step for peace that could result in one giant step in reducing violence throughout our country. Call or e-mail U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown and U.S. Rep. John Boehner and tell them you support these bills for positive criminal justice reform.

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