

BRADENTON, FL -- Congressman Vern Buchanan today unveiled sweeping legislation to combat gang violence – a plan forged through months of listening sessions he held with community leaders throughout the district.

The Gang Reduction, Investment, and Prevention Act (GRIP) will strengthen and improve federal gang prevention programs. Buchanan said he will introduce the bill later today in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“The best ideas come from our people and our communities, not from Washington,” Buchanan said. “I credit our committed public servants here today with helping to craft this important legislation.”

Buchanan’s bill provides significant resources for community-based gang prevention and intervention programs focused on at-risk and gang involved youth and provides law enforcement with additional tools to crack down on gang violence.

“Following the gang-related shooting death of nine year-old Stacy Williams III, I convened a number of roundtables to discuss the issue of gang violence,” said Buchanan. “I met with local law enforcement, community activists, religious leaders and elected officials to discuss ways to deal with this growing problem. What came out of these meetings was a common theme: the gang problem is getting worse, and it is no longer a local issue, but a national one requiring a national strategy.

“I received a number of different recommendations during these roundtable discussions, and have taken these ideas to Washington,” said Buchanan. “The result is legislation to help local law enforcement by providing more federal assistance for high intensity gang activity; add prosecutors to deal with gang-related crimes; create a national database to track gang violence; strengthen witness protection programs so citizens will testify without fear of reprisals; and enhance after-school programs to give youths an alternative to joining gangs. The bill also expands a federal mentoring initiative and creates a grant program for non-profit and faith-based after school programs. As the debate in Congress on gang violence enforcement and prevention moves forward, I believe the roundtable recommendations and this bill deserve strong consideration.”

Several community leaders joined Buchanan at a press conference at the Manatee YMCA to announce the bill.

“The City of Bradenton is on board with supporting Congressman Buchanan’s legislation,” said Mayor Wayne Poston. “We have had a full time gang unit in the city of Bradenton since May 2006 and our gang units are certified as gang specialists by the FGIA (Florida Gang Investigation Association). We have been part of the multi-agency gang task force since February 2007. We have had great federal help and we are in our 2nd year using a federal gang grant to fight the problem in our community.”

“I am grateful for the leadership Congressman Buchanan is showing on this issue at the federal level and look forward to working with him at the state level to address this most important issue.” Rep. Bill Galvano.

“I am encouraged by several key elements contained in the bill,” said Sheriff Steube. “Federal monies will be made available on the local level for prevention and educational efforts, additional prosecutors, overtime, and grants that could fund after school programs. This is definitely a step in the right direction.”

Poston, Galvano, and Steube were among those who participated in Buchanan’s roundtable discussions and provided input for the bill.