

**Legislation offered to help combat gang violence
by Reps. Jennifer Mann and Mike Sturla**

Harrisburg - Gang violence is no longer just a “big city” problem – gang-related crimes have been on the rise all over Pennsylvania in communities generally considered “safe” by their residents.

We have introduced legislation that would give police and district attorneys more power in combating the growing problems of gang violence. [House Bill 2892](#) would define criminal gang activity and establish strict penalties for people who commit gang-related crimes. Conviction under the bill could add up to 10 years to a gang member’s prison sentence and result in fines of \$500 to \$5,000, which would be used to set up a Criminal Gang Deterrence Fund that would fund community programs to deter criminal gang activity and keep kids out of gangs.

The federal government is already providing financial aid to help our communities curb gang violence: U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has designated the Route 222 corridor in Pennsylvania, which encompasses Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, Reading and Lancaster, as one of six sites across the country to receive a \$2.5 million federal grant to aid in local anti-gang activities. It is essential that we strengthen state law and provide state funding to eliminate these violent street gangs.

On Sept. 26, the state legislature has dedicated a day to discuss escalating gun-related crimes, including gang violence, and formulate ways to stop the rising tide of criminal activity in our communities. Pennsylvania is one of only 11 states without specific laws to address gang violence, and that has to change if we can have any success in eliminating the gun-drug-violence trifecta that is so damaging to our youth and to the residents of our state. We urge our colleagues to consider H.B. 2892 as one of the solutions to reducing the toll gang violence and other gun-related crimes are exacting on our communities.

Reps. Jennifer Mann and Mike Sturla represent the 132nd and 96th legislative districts in the state House.