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WASHINGTON D.C. — Cong. Charles Rangel (D-NY), chair of the House Narcotics Abuse and Control Caucus, today unveiled a plan to provide training, jobs and early release for nonviolent offenders.

Rangel discussed his plan during a roundtable in the Capitol with urban affairs and narcotics reporters. He said he had written to all 50 state governors, some of whom have early-release programs in operation without jobs components.

"I am in the process of drafting legislation to allow the U.S. attorney general to provide assistance to those states with programs designed to release nonviolent offenders who have undergone vigorous, closely supervised training while incarcerated," Rangel said. "This initiative will have built-in for these parolees a pool of jobs provided by companies that will be granted tax credits in return for their investment in the community."

Rangel said he also supported a call by Attorney General Reno for a review of federal prosecution and sentencing policies, which, he said, have disproportionately affected the poor and small-time drug offenders. However, Rangel said he would reserve judgment on exactly how the policy should be changed.

Rangel said, however, that the cycle of incarceration and unemployment had caused severe problems in urban communities that he hopes to address with his proposal. "It is clear to me that to be truly effective, any problem to rebuild our beleaguered communities will have to address the issue of reintegrating the ex-convict population into productive society," Rangel said.

"Without such an emphasis, we are destined to continue not only the cycle of recidivism but the drain on the public treasury in lost or wasted resources. The end result will be the emasculation of every other effort to reinvigorate our cities."

Rangel said the Clinton administration had already agreed to look beyond law enforcement as the solution to the country's urban problems. "The administration has agreed to look at areas which have concentrations of crime, poverty, unemployment, high dropout rates, substance abuse and health problems, which together are costing the economy at least $300 billion a year."

"This is a new beginning in the assault on drugs," Rangel said. "I am encouraged that with Lee Brown in the cabinet, the president, unlike his predecessor, will not rely on a Crime Bill to correct conditions that stem from poverty, homelessness, miseducation and hopelessness. It's been proven already that jailing thousands and thousands of our young people, many for nonviolent offenses, hasn't solved the drug problem. Law enforcement alone is not the solution to our problems."

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