

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Executive Business Meeting
April 30, 2015**

Today we are considering a bill introduced by Senator Franken, and cosponsored by eleven other members of this Committee, including myself. I am proud to support S.993, the Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act which will reauthorize and improve the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act. I was a cosponsor of this legislation when it was first introduced in 2004. Senator Franken knows well the importance of addressing mental illness, and continuing the work of another great Minnesotan, the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Senator Wellstone left a true legacy, ensuring that mental illness and addiction are treated just like any other physical illnesses by most insurance companies.

This treatment is especially critical for those involved in the criminal justice system. This bill reauthorizes that treatment, and aims to improve interactions between the mentally ill and law enforcement by supporting training programs for police and correctional officers. This is crucial to preventing unnecessary violence in our communities. I am grateful to Senator Franken for his commitment to this issue, and I look forward to supporting this bill.

Unfortunately, there are no judicial nominees on today's agenda. This is because this Committee has not held a hearing on a judicial nomination in more than seven weeks and we have several well qualified nominees waiting for a hearing. Five of the pending judicial nominees were nominated over five months ago, including three who will fill judicial emergency vacancies.

Chairman Grassley noticed a nominations hearing for next week, and I hope it will include Luis Felipe Restrepo, a nominee from Pennsylvania for the Third Circuit. Judge Restrepo was unanimously confirmed by the Senate two years ago by voice vote to serve on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. By all accounts he has done an outstanding job. He was nominated to the Third Circuit over five months ago with the support of Senators Casey and Toomey. In the time his nomination has been pending, the judgeship he will fill has become a "judicial emergency vacancy." I hope this judicial emergency vacancy will be considered soon.

#####