

October 21, 2015

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Leahy:

We are writing to voice our support for the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 (S.2123). As conservative and faith-based organizations, we applaud your thoughtful deliberations resulting in this important reform legislation.

Crime demands accountability. It's not a question of whether to punish wrongdoing, but for how long and for what purpose. Punishment should be proportionate to the offense and prisons should embrace a constructive culture that reflects the pro-social values we expect men and women to practice upon release. This legislation reflects these goals and aims to restore all parties impacted by crime and incarceration.

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act takes a targeted approach to expand the federal safety valve and limit the application of mandatory minimums to more serious offenses. These reforms uphold our values of liberty and justice, without impeding our ability to combat drug violence and protect victims. We also applaud the retroactive application of these reforms as a moral imperative for those prisoners who are currently serving disproportionate and unjust sentences.

These sentencing changes will help address the unsustainable growth in the federal prison system. The federal prison population has increased from approximately 25,000 in 1980 to over 205,000 today. Federal prisons have a 30 percent overcrowding rate and even higher overcrowding exists in high security facilities. As a result, the inmate-to-staff ratio has increased, putting corrections officials and prisoners at risk and making it more difficult to operate effective faith-based and other recidivism-reduction programs. The large prison population also comes at a price. The Bureau of Prisons' budget has doubled over the past decade, reaching approximately \$7 billion and nearly 25 percent of the Department of Justice's total budget.

Recognizing this great expense, the legislation also aims to improve our prisons' rate of return. The bill directs the Department of Justice to expand recidivism reduction programming, such as drug rehabilitation, education, skills training, faith-based classes, and work programs, for all federal prisoners in partnership with non-profit and faith-based organizations. The Bureau of Prisons is directed to use risk and needs assessment tools to assign the most effective amount and type of programming to each prisoner and provides incentives for program participation.

All federal prisoners who complete programs are eligible for incentives developed by the Bureau of Prisons, such as increased telephone or visitation privileges. If prisoners reach a moderate or low-risk classification, they may use time credits earned from program completion toward prerelease custody in a residential reentry center, on home confinement, or on community supervision. Additionally, the bill authorizes U.S. Probation to conduct a pilot program in which

individuals with substance-abuse issues are subject to high-intensity community supervision, and swift, predictable and graduated sanctions for breaking program rules. The pilot is modeled after the HOPE program in Hawaii, which has been highly successful in curtailing participants' substance abuse.

We believe these changes will improve public safety, strengthen families and communities, restore proportionate sentencing, and improve the effectiveness and culture of our prisons. We thank you for your leadership and urge your colleagues to support the passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Melissa Ortiz
Principal & Founder
Able Americans

Rabbi Aaron Lipskar
Executive Director
Aleph Institute

Alex-St. James
Executive Director, Blacks Economic Security Trust (BEST)
Chairman Emeritus, African-American Republican Leadership Council

Abby Skeans
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Timothy Head
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Harry R. Jackson Jr.
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Craig DeRoche
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Leith Anderson
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National Association of Evangelicals

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Eli Lehrer
President
R Street Institute

Marc Levin
Director
Right on Crime

Russell Moore
President
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission