

Statement of

# **The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
November 5, 2009

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,  
Subcommittee On Crime And Drugs Hearing On  
"The First Line Of Defense: Reducing Recidivism At The Local Level"  
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I thank Senator Cardin for holding this important hearing focused on reducing recidivism through improved programs at the local level for those reentering the community from jails and prisons. I have worked hard over the years to make progress on this issue, including working with now-Vice President Biden, and Senators Brownback and Specter and others to pass the Second Chance Act last year to support and strengthen prisoner reentry programs in communities around the country. I am glad that Senator Cardin is joining this important effort.

As a former prosecutor, I strongly believe in securing tough and appropriate prison sentences for people who break our laws. But it is also important that we do everything we can to ensure that when these people get out of prison, they enter our communities as productive members of society. We must begin to reverse the dangerous cycles of recidivism and violence.

In recent years, Congress and the States have passed a myriad of new criminal laws creating longer sentences for more crimes. As a result, this country sends more and more people to prison every year. There are currently more than two million people in jail or prison, and there are more than 13 million people who spend some time in jail or prison each year. Most of these people will at some point return to our communities. What kind of experience inmates have while incarcerated, how we prepare them to rejoin society, and how we integrate them into the broader community when they get out are issues that profoundly affect the communities in which we live.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of today's witnesses on ways we can reduce recidivism by focusing on reentry at the local level. These ideas will be important as we consider reauthorization of the Second Chance Act next year. I hope that Senator Cardin will join with Senator Brownback and me as we consider ways to improve and expand upon the success of that important piece of bipartisan legislation.

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