

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
July 21, 2010

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
"The Second Chance Act: Strengthening Safe And Effective Community Reentry"
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Today, the Committee considers the important issue of how best to ensure that when people get out of prison, they become productive members of society, rather than returning to a life of crime. Many states are making great strides with innovative prisoner reentry programs, and we will hear about some of those efforts today. In 2008, we passed the Second Chance Act to give Federal, state and local governments additional tools to help inmates more successfully reintegrate into their communities upon release, and we will hear about the impact this important legislation is beginning to have nationwide.

The Senate recognized the value of the Second Chance Act when, after a great deal of work and compromise, the bill was passed unanimously. Next year, the Act will need to be reauthorized, and I hope that we can again work with bipartisanship to extend these important programs. I was pleased to work with Senator Brownback, Senator Specter, and then-Senator Biden to pass the Second Chance Act, and I look forward to hearing about the good work that has come from it. I know Senator Cardin has a strong interest in this area. I would also thank Senator Whitehouse both for his leadership on prison reform and reentry and for helping with today's hearing.

In the past few decades, Congress and the states have passed several new criminal laws creating more and longer sentences for more and 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 more than 13 million people 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 in prison, how we prepare them to rejoin society, and how we integrate them into the broader community when they are released are issues that profoundly affect the communities in which we live.

Even before we passed the Second Chance Act, Vermont and other states were implementing innovative programs to build safer and stronger communities by ensuring that people leaving prison receive the services that help them become productive members of society and keep them from committing additional crimes.

The Second Chance Act builds on this important work by funding collaborations between state and local corrections agencies, nonprofits, educational institutions, service providers, and

families to ensure that offenders released into society have the resources and support they need to become contributing members of the community. The bill requires that the programs supported by these grants demonstrate measurable positive results, including a reduction in recidivism. It takes an important step toward the goal of reducing the nationwide recidivism rate of 66 percent and decreasing the annual nationwide \$8.2 billion dollar cost of incarceration.

The Vermont Department of Corrections and many others in Vermont have strongly supported this crucial piece of legislation, which gives me confidence that it is an important step in making our country safer. We are joined today by Commissioner Andrew Pallito from the Vermont Department of Corrections, who will share with us his experience with reentry programs in Vermont. I know that Commissioner Pallito has had great success developing reentry programs and educating the community about their importance, and I look forward to hearing more about his innovative and exciting work in Vermont.

I am also pleased to welcome Le'Ann Duran from the National Reentry Resource Center, and Sol Rodriguez from OpenDoors in Rhode Island. We will hear her thoughts on how Second Chance Act support has strengthened safe and effective community reentry in Rhode Island and nationwide.

As a former prosecutor, I believe strongly 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, so we can start to reverse the dangerous cycles of recidivism and violence. The Second Chance Act helps break this cycle.

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