

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
July 14, 2011

**Opening Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy,
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Executive Business Meeting
July 14, 2011**

Today the Committee considers the bipartisan Second Chance Reauthorization Act, which I introduced with Senator Portman. This bill builds on recent successes and takes important new steps to ensure that people coming out of prison do not simply return to a life of crime. That saves taxpayer money and makes us all safer. I want to thank Senator Portman for his commitment to this program, which extends back to when he was a member of the House of Representatives and we worked to enact this measure in a bipartisan, bicameral way.

Four years ago, I joined with then-Senators Biden, Specter, and Brownback as an original co-sponsor of the Second Chance Act, and I was pleased as Judiciary Chairman to help move that legislation through the Senate. The Senate recognized the value of the Second Chance Act when we passed the bill unanimously. It was signed enthusiastically by President Bush and had the support of religious organizations and law enforcement and people across the political spectrum.

Members of the House from both sides of the aisle have expressed interest in continuing the Second Chance Act. I hope that reauthorizing this sensible program receives the bipartisan support it deserves here in the Senate Judiciary Committee. This effort is supported by a broad array of organizations from the Prison Fellowship, National Association of Evangelicals and other faith-based organizations to Covenant House, the Children's Defense Fund and the PTA. It should not fall victim to the partisanship and gridlock that have hindered progress on so many important fronts.

In the past few decades, Congress and the states have passed new criminal laws creating more and longer sentences for more crimes. There are currently more than two million people in jail or prison in the United States, and more than 13 million people spend some time in jail or prison each year. The Second Chance Act recognizes that most of these people will at some point return to our communities.

The Act authorized grants for key reentry programs and requires that these programs demonstrate measurable positive results, including a reduction in recidivism. Preliminary studies show that these programs are yielding positive results.

The bill that we consider today improves and reauthorizes the state and local government grant

programs created by the Second Chance Act. It is intended to ensure that funding is available for key reentry projects and that evidence-based methodology is employed to ensure meaningful reductions in recidivism rates.

Our bill also consolidates programs to ensure that Federal dollars are effectively utilized. We significantly reduce authorization levels to reflect concerns about budget and spending. We promote accountability by requiring periodic audits of grantees to ensure that Federal dollars are responsibly spent. Grantees with problematic audits will not be eligible for funding in future years.

The substitute I will offer today also contains a provision requested by the administration that streamlines Federal good conduct time calculations. It will lead to substantially easier management of the existing modest sentencing reductions for those who behave well and follow the rules in prison and will reduce litigation. This provision will help alleviate prison overcrowding and should save the Federal Government \$40 million. It is supported by organizations ranging from the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association to the NAACP.

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 reenter our communities as productive members of society. That is how we can start to reverse the dangerous cycle of recidivism and violence. The Second Chance Reauthorization Act will help break this cycle.

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