

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
July 21, 2011

**Opening Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy,
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Executive Business Meeting
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Today the Committee should complete its consideration of the bipartisan Second Chance Reauthorization Act. This bill, which I introduced with Senator Portman, 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 was glad last week to accept Senator Cornyn's amendment to ensure that qualified faith-based and community-based programs interested in providing Second Chance services may do so. Senator Cornyn mentioned the importance of hearings in this area, and I wanted to remind the Committee that we held a hearing on the Second Chance Act last year, as well as an additional subcommittee hearing in the last Congress on recidivism reduction programs. Senator Portman and I also reached out to Committee members, as well as to states and outside organizations, in putting together this reauthorization and preparing for Committee consideration of the bill. I am happy to continue this outreach going forward.

I appreciated Senator Coburn saying last week that he would hold off on offering his amendments, and I will be happy to work out short time agreements to consider those on the floor. I know that he circulated amendments proposing sunsets for the Second Chance Act. I should note that this bill is a five-year authorization, which by its terms requires reauthorization again after that. That is how limited authorizations work, and it is why we are considering this reauthorization now. Senator Portman and I learned from that first authorization period, and that led us to the consolidated, streamlined version we are discussing today.

I did want to comment on the assurances Senator Coburn said that he received when he and Senator Sessions were holding up the original Second Chance Act in 2008. He said he was assured that this was a one-time-only program that would never be reauthorized. As Senator Coburn said, he never received any such assurance from me, and I can add that no such plan came up in my conversations with the bill's other original cosponsors.

Senator Grassley said that he would like to offer two additional amendments. I have been working with him in the intervening week, and I think we have worked out modifications that we can adopt quickly. We should be able to make quick progress on this bill that has always had support from both sides of the aisle and from organizations like the Prison Fellowship and the

National Association of Evangelicals.

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.

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.

Also today we will seek to report out important nominations.

After these matters that have been carried over from last week, we have Senator Kohl and Senator Grassley's bill on generics, which we have reported before, and a bill from Senator Whitehouse and Senator Graham to combat the sale of counterfeit goods to the military.

Also on the agenda is a bill Senator Cornyn and I have worked on together for years to provide prosecutors with important new tools to go after public corruption. We have worked out a bipartisan, bicameral agreement with Congressman Sensenbrenner that I hope will enable us to make real progress in this area at long last.

I have also included a bill from Senator Cardin and Senator Graham, the Blue Alert bill, which is so important to law enforcement, as well as three bipartisan bills to outlaw new and dangerous synthetic drugs. The New York Times had a major story this weekend about the horrific effects of "bath salts" and other synthetic drugs, and I thank Senators Schumer, Grassley, Klobuchar and Feinstein for their work on these bills and Senator Casey for his leadership on this issue.

Each of the bills on the agenda is bipartisan. I hope we can make quick progress on all of them.

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