



October 20, 2015

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Leahy:

On behalf of the 123,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing in support of S. 2123, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (SRCA) of 2015. APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprising researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, profession, and means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.

S.2123 seeks to take critical steps toward the reform of our nation's criminal justice system. We are particularly appreciative of your efforts to: avoid racial and other disparities in addressing offenders' risks and needs; reform unproductive mandatory minimums that disproportionately harm minority offenders, their families, and their communities; retroactively apply sentencing reforms, including disparities created by crack/powder cocaine sentencing disparities; further support prisoner education and vocational training; facilitate Department of Veterans Affairs access to veterans reentering society from prison; limit juvenile solitary confinement; and protect juvenile records. APA has a history of science-based advocacy around many of these issues, and we would be happy to assist their advancement, however possible.

We understand that S. 2123 is a result of a delicate process of negotiation, however, we hope the Judiciary Committee will consider an addition to the bill we believe is in the spirit of SRCA. In broadening the existing safety valve, we urge the Committee to incorporate language pertaining to offenses in which mental health disorders, addiction, trauma, victimization, or other similar factors played a direct role. This language would seek to empower courts to consider such factors in individual cases; it would not prevent offenders being held accountable for their actions. In allowing judges sentencing discretion--moving away from unnecessarily restrictive mandatory minimums--the change would result in budgetary savings and would help further decrease the overcrowded prison population. Moreover, in putting decision-making in the hands of judges who know their communities, it would enhance local control of local issues.

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Thank you, once more, for your strong leadership in introducing the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, which addresses some of the most vital issues facing American society today. If you have any questions, or if our Association can be of assistance in your efforts, please contact Micah Haskell-Hoehl (202-336-5935, mhaskell-hoehl@apa.org) in our Government Relations Office. We look forward to working with you as you move toward justice system reform.

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Public Interest Directorate

Cc: Members, Senate Committee on the Judiciary