

October 21, 2015

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Grassley and Leahy:

We write to thank you for your leadership on federal criminal justice reform. The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, S. 2123, is a thoughtful, balanced approach to reforming the federal criminal justice system. We are encouraged by the fact that the bill is the product of serious bipartisan negotiation based on data, research, and the experience of reform in numerous states and localities. We are also encouraged the bill takes a system-wide approach to reforming front-end sentencing, providing programming for inmates in prison, and targeting evidence-based services to offenders returning to society.

In recent years, it has become evident that policies adopted in response to the crack cocaine epidemic and related violence of the 1980's led to an overreliance on mandatory minimum sentences for certain federal drug offenders. As a result, the federal prison population ballooned and many individuals, some who committed relatively minor offenses, were given disproportionately lengthy sentences in overcrowded prisons. These policies contributed, in part, to a dramatic reduction in crime. In most communities across America, the violent crime rate is at an all-time low.

However, the cost to our communities, particularly to the social fabric in urban, minority neighborhoods, has been high. So, too, are the costs of incarceration. The Federal Bureau of Prison's (BOP) budget has risen dramatically in recent years. Taxpayers spend \$7 billion annually to house federal prisoners, and BOP's budget is expected to consume one-third of the Department of Justice's budget by 2020. Absent new resources, this increase for BOP means a dramatic reduction in funding to federal, state and local law enforcement and other services for preventing and fighting crime in the first place.

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act reforms federal mandatory minimum sentencing in a thoughtful and balanced manner to ensure that those individuals with substantial authority or control over the criminal activity of a criminal organization serve the appropriate time their crimes deserve, while providing judges with flexibility for the sentencing of others entangled in the buying and selling of certain drugs.

Furthermore, once convicted, federal prisoners have little opportunity to develop the skills they need to become productive members of society when they leave prison. Too many individuals who serve time in federal prison will commit another crime and return to custody. The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act would require the Bureau of Prisons to assess the risk of

recidivism and need for services for every offender entering federal prison. Certain medium and low-risk offenders would be offered services focused on the skills they need to change their behavior and return productively to society. Upon successful completion of those courses and programs, offenders would be allowed to serve some portion of their remaining sentence under community supervision or home confinement.

Experience at the state level proves that reform can be achieved without jeopardizing public safety. For instance, California, New Jersey, and New York have reduced their prison populations by about 25 percent in the past 15 years while at the same time reducing rates in all categories of crime and violence below the national average. Texas reduced crime while avoiding more than \$3 billion in the costs of constructing new prison beds.

We, the undersigned groups, have expertise in state and local justice systems and the system-wide reforms adopted in many states over the past decade or more. These reforms form the foundation of this bill. Our organizations know that criminal justice is a system that has to be in balance to be fair, efficient and must utilize evidence-based practices to be cost-effective. Reform of the federal criminal justice system will help to restore balance, improve outcomes for returning offenders, and save taxpayer money that should be invested in the prevention of crime and in services for victims of crime and for those returning to our communities from prison.

Thank you for your leadership and vision. We look forward to working with you as this bill moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

*National Criminal Justice Association  
Association of Prosecuting Attorneys  
National League of Cities  
Pretrial Justice Institute  
National Association of Drug Court Professionals  
National Association of Social Workers  
Illinois TASC*