



Steve Bullock
Governor of Montana
Chair

Larry Hogan
Governor of Maryland
Vice Chair

Scott D. Pattison
Executive Director and CEO

September 7, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Schumer, Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

On behalf of the National Governors Association (NGA) we write to you to encourage the Senate, and Congress, to move forward on much-needed criminal justice and sentencing reform.

Collectively, governors believe in implementing smarter, fairer and more cost-effective policies that seek to strengthen their criminal justice systems. Over the last 20 years, many states have implemented system-wide criminal justice reforms and have seen improved public safety outcomes in their communities. This includes efforts that help to safely reduce prison and jail populations; strengthen support for victims; reduce recidivism and improve reentry processes and adopt evidence-based, data-driven policies. These reforms ultimately seek to promote public safety and help those who have paid their debt achieve gainful employment and skills to be productive members of society.

As the Senate looks to address overall criminal justice and sentencing reform, governors ask that you consider the inclusion of several principles that are critical to states, including:

- Statutory flexibility to establish and enforce policies that are consistent with the goals of reducing crime, incarceration and recidivism rates;
- Required utilization of risk and needs assessments for individuals when entering prison;
- Implementation of evidence-based policies that reduce crime rates and use taxpayer dollars effectively;
- Support for reentry policies and programs that provide incarcerated persons opportunities to learn marketable job skills, attain education and prepare for reintegration into our communities;

- Ensured rehabilitative programs and activities, such as drug rehabilitation, education, skills training and work programs, that incentivize individuals and help them return to their communities;
- Support for mental health and substance use disorder treatment—such as medication-assisted treatment—inside correctional settings and upon release;
- Enhanced efforts to secure identification for returning citizens;
- Increased fairness in sentencing for lower-level, nonviolent offenders and
- Reinforced federal support, funding and coordination of justice-assistant grant programs for states—e.g. Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG), Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Second Chance Act.

The inclusion of such principles and policies create significant benefits at the state level.

Since the passage of the Mississippi Right on Crime Act of 2014, which includes several of these core principles, Mississippi has reduced its prison population by 3,000 nonviolent offenders, saved \$40 million and helped reduce crime by 6 percent.

In Minnesota, we are using evidenced-based programming funded through the Federal Second Chance Act to train our staff in correctional practices that lower recidivism and educate individuals in high-demand workforce programs, improving their opportunity for a successful transition when they return to the community.

Governors across the country will continue to call on both Congress and the administration to work in a bipartisan manner to implement bold, sustainable reform initiatives that build on the successes at the state level and help modernize our federal criminal justice system.

NGA looks forward to working with you on this critical issue. If you have any questions or want to know more about what states are doing to help improve their systems, please reach out to NGA Legislative Director Mary Catherine Ott (mcott@nga.org; 202.719.2867) for more information.

Sincerely,



Governor Phil Bryant
Chair
NGA Homeland Security and Public Safety
Committee



Governor Mark Dayton
Vice-Chair
NGA Homeland Security and Public Safety
Committee

cc.

Speaker of the House, the Honorable Paul Ryan
House Minority Leader, the Honorable Nancy Pelosi