



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

November 30, 2018

Dear Members of Congress,

The Circle of Protection is comprised of leaders from a wide array of Christian bodies and organizations. Since 2011, we have worked together to maintain a Circle of Protection around people struggling with hunger, poverty, and injustice. **We urge you and your colleagues to pass the FIRST STEP Act (S.3649) before the end of the year.** This bill will improve the lives of thousands of people involved in our federal criminal justice system.

The FIRST STEP Act (S.3649) includes prison reform provisions that will end the shackling of pregnant inmates, enhance compassionate release for terminally ill and elderly prisoners, assist returning citizens with obtaining government ID documents, and fix the earned time credit system.

The bill also includes meaningful efforts to address unjust sentencing laws. We applaud the bipartisan efforts of Congressional leaders and the White House to ensure that this package includes sentencing reforms. These changes aim to restore more proportional sentences and reduce the rates of recidivism.

The Act allocates additional financial resources for rehabilitative programming and should thus reduce wait times. It increases access to prisons by faith-based organizations and volunteers. It also creates an independent review committee to assist the Attorney General in selecting a risk assessment tool. Risk assessment must be done in a way that does not exacerbate racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

Our churches and organizations work with millions of people on the margins, including many who are somehow involved in the criminal justice system. We see in their experiences the shortcomings of our criminal justice system and the disproportionate impact in communities of color.

While more must be done to reform America's criminal justice system, this bill is indeed an important first step. We encourage you to pass the FIRST STEP Act (S. 3649) before the end of the year.

Sincerely,

Members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee



Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals



* Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World



Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, General Secretary and Chief Administrative Officer, Progressive National Baptist Convention



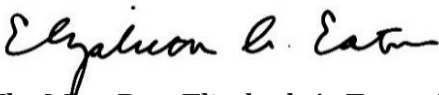
Dr. Iva Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference



The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church



The Most Rev. Bishop Frank J. Dewane, Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



The Most Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador and General Superintendent Emerita, Wesleyan Church



* Rev. Carlos Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together U.S.A. (in his personal capacity)



Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA



Ralph Middlecamp, President, National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul



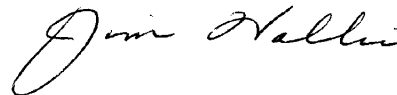
Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation



Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition



Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



* Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners



* Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network and President, Skinner Leadership Institute

* Circle of Protection Steering Committee Co-
Coordinators are marked with an asterisk