



Jesuit Conference

Office of Justice and Ecology

The Society of Jesus in
Canada and the United States

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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Office of Justice and Ecology of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, I encourage you to support S.1917, the *Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017*. Our longstanding Jesuit tradition of serving those impacted by the criminal justice system has taught us that sentencing policies, prison programming, and reentry services in the United States are desperately in need of reform.

As Catholics, we recognize the important role that the criminal justice system must play in protecting people and advancing the common good. Our faith also teaches that all people are redeemable and possess inherent human dignity. In their letter *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote, "We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or re-integration of all into the community."

The *Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act* represents a modest step towards a comprehensive overhaul of our criminal justice system. The bill does the following:

- Reforms & targets enhanced mandatory minimums for prior drug crimes;
- Increases judicial discretion for sentencing of certain nonviolent offenses;
- Applies the *Fair Sentencing Act* and other sentencing reforms retroactively;
- Establishes recidivism reduction programs to facilitate successful reentry;
- Limits solitary confinement for juveniles in Federal custody.

While we support the provisions mentioned above, we are disappointed by the inclusion of additional mandatory minimum sentences related to the opioid crisis. History has shown us that we cannot incarcerate our way out of a drug epidemic. This current crisis is no different.

Pope Francis reminds us that, "God is in everyone's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else." Passage of the *Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act*, while only a first step, would make criminal justice less punitive and instead promote healing, restoration, and hope for all.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. Please contact Matt Cuff (mcuff@jesuits.org) for more information.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jean Denis Saint-Félix, SJ

Secretary
Office of Justice and Ecology
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States