

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

May 5, 2016

RE: Faith community calls for vote on the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, S. 2123

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

Last week sponsors of the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 2123) announced new changes to strengthen their bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation. Indeed, eight new senators last week joined the long list of cosponsors. The 62 undersigned faith organizations are delighted by the progress made in advancing this critical legislation and the broad bipartisan consensus calling for an end to the federal prison crisis. **We urge you to support S. 2123 and to act quickly to bring the legislation to a floor vote this month.**

Our faith communities are on the front lines in neighborhoods ravaged by a broken criminal justice system. From our vantage point, we see this nation's reliance on mass incarceration to solve drug addiction, poverty, mental illness and joblessness as an affront to justice and human dignity. As people of faith, we are called to comfort and serve those harmed by crime and support accountability, rehabilitation and restoration for those who offend. To that end, we are joined in our commitment to advancing the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act.

A federal prison crisis is looming due to overcrowding caused by excessive mandatory minimum sentences and a prison system with limited rehabilitative opportunities. Our moral sensibility compels faith leaders across the country to call for reform and we can no longer wait for action. To miss the opportunity to pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act would be a major setback for thousands of people awaiting justice and a fairer sentencing system and in need of rehabilitative support.

Moreover, we believe inaction will harm children and families across the country. The burden of mass incarceration is felt most intensely by children with parents in prison or labeled with a criminal record. The long absence of mothers and fathers, who despite their failings are loved, valued and critical to maintaining their children's well-being, has a lasting impact. Nationally, one out of nine African American children has an incarcerated parent. Their likelihood of incarceration increases when this disruption enters their life.

The bill's provisions to limit federal life sentences for youth and adults are particularly commendable, and consistent with a respect for human dignity, as are its provisions to end solitary confinement for youth. We are also eager to see this legislation provide for furthering rehabilitative programming, including expanding access to treatment and restorative justice programs and education for those in prison.

While we object to the implementation of the new mandatory minimum sentences and mandatory enhancements currently prescribed in S. 2123, we acknowledge the bill's overall contribution to furthering a fair and proportional justice system. We urge you to take the important next step of allowing a vote on S. 2123 by the full Senate this month.

Sincerely,

Adorers of the Blood of Christ, U.S. Region

Africa Faith & Justice Network
African American Ministers In Action
Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Home Mission Societies
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Bread for the World
BuddhaFest
Buddhist Association of the United States (BAUS)
Catholic Charities USA
Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good
Church of the Brethren
Church of Scientology National Office
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Disciples Home Missions
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Exodus Foundation.org
Faith Action Network – Washington
Faith in Public Life
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Glenmary Home Missioners - Commission on Justice
The Global Justice Institute
Healing Communities USA
Ignatian Solidarity Network
Insight Meditation Society
Islamic Society of North America, Office for Interfaith & Community Alliances
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Kentucky Council of Churches
Lutheran Services in America
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Metropolitan Community Churches
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Nichiren Order of North America
Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, Comboni Missionaries, North American Province
The Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church

Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Provincial Council of the Clerics of St. Viator (Viatorians)
Riverside Church – New York City
The Salvation Army National Headquarters
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Institute Justice Team
The Society of the Divine Savior USA
Sojourners
Tampa Bay Center for Community Transformation - Florida
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
United (Vietnamese) Buddhist Churches
Volunteers of America

Cc: U.S. Senate