



NATIONAL BLACK PROSECUTORS ASSOCIATION
33rd ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND JOB FAIR
St. Louis, Missouri
July 10th, 2016 – July 16th, 2016

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April 19, 2016

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
United States Senate
135 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
United States Senate
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4502

Re: Sentencing and Corrections Reform Act of 2015

Dear Senators Grassley and Leahy:

On behalf of the National Black Prosecutors Association (NBPA), I write to express our support for the Sentencing and Corrections Reform Act of 2015 (S.2123). We view this Act as a forward thinking way to address some of the concerns in our criminal justice system.

Founded in 1983, the NBPA is a national organization comprised of local, state and federal prosecutors, dedicated to the advancement of African Americans in the field of prosecution. We are the only organization with the mission of the hiring, training, retention and promotion of African Americans as prosecutors. Our members are on the front lines in courtrooms nationwide. We witness firsthand the effects that budgetary constraints have upon the ability to adequately staff offices, fund beneficial programs for the community as well as law enforcement, and the negative impact this reduction of resources has on the criminal justice system.

As prosecutors of color, we are also acutely aware of the fears of the communities we serve regarding crime and firearms. The NBPA, upon reviewing the earlier version of this Act, had grave concerns – especially regarding reducing minimum mandatory sentences for Armed Career Criminals. We strive to be tougher on illegal firearms and the use of firearms in our communities; it is incongruent with that mission if lighter sentences are given to those who terrorize the community with guns. We brought our concerns to the attention of Senators Grassley, Cornyn and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee; in their heeding our calls for a balance of reform and safety, we now wholeheartedly support this legislation.

National Black Prosecutors Association
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The Sentencing and Corrections Reform Act of 2015, when made into law, will seek to address the delicate balance of reducing sentences for non-violent offenders, while ensuring incarceration of the most violent among us. Additionally, federal incarceration is now one of our nation's greatest expenditures. There is no question that the safety of our nation is paramount, and that no expense should be spared to achieve this goal. However, it would be most prudent to utilize funding towards incarcerating the most violent of offenders, not low risk, non-violent offenders who would be better served with a lesser prison sentence. By reducing the prison population through expanding the discretionary powers of the judiciary, and allowing prosecutors to be involved in the granting (or denial) of prisoner petitions for release, more funds will become available to fund law enforcement, crime prevention, and recidivism reduction programming nationwide. This will serve to ultimately make our communities safer.

We need to strike a balance between being both tough *and* smart on crime. This Act is the first step in the right direction.

We remain available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melba V. Pearson', enclosed within a large, loopy oval flourish.

Melba V. Pearson
President,
National Black Prosecutors Association