



Senate Judiciary Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Monday, November 13, 2017

RE: Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 1917)

Dear Senators:

The National Center for Transgender Equality strongly supports the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act. While we believe the bill could go further in eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, we applaud this bipartisan legislation for its potential to significantly reform current mass incarceration policies at the federal level.

These reforms are crucial for LGBT people, and transgender people in particular. One in 8 transgender people are either currently incarcerated or have been incarcerated, and those rates jump for trans Latinas and African-Americans to one in four and one in two respectively, according to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey. Not only do transgender people and people of color face higher rates of contact with the criminal justice system, they also face highlighted levels of physical and sexual violence while incarcerated. One in three transgender prisoners report being sexually assaulted in the previous year, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Reducing mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses, giving federal judge's discretion to go below mandatory minimums, and retroactively enforcing drug sentencing reform are critical first steps to reducing the disparate effect that current sentencing policies have on transgender people, and in particular on transgender people of color.

Only 5-7% of youth are thought to be LGBTQ yet these youth are disproportionately incarcerated, making up 20% of those in the juvenile justice system. Reforming the federal juvenile justice system by banning solitary confinement and allowing for criminal record sealing and expungement for juveniles are crucial first steps to advancing their access to opportunities and prospects upon reentering society.

This bill contains meaningful reforms that are overdue. We urge you to move swiftly to pass the broadest, most comprehensive reform possible.

Sincerely,

Harper Jean Tobin
Policy Director, National Center for Transgender Equality