



February 9, 2018

Chairman Chuck Grassley  
United States Senate Judiciary Committee  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate Judiciary Committee  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20510

Re: The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, (S.1917)

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) writes to express our support for the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 1917). We believe that the reforms proposed here have the potential to produce a more humane system that provides the services prisoners need to re-enter their communities successfully upon release.

NDRN is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems for individuals with disabilities. The P&As were established by the United States Congress through eight separate programs to protect the rights of people with disabilities and their families through legal support, advocacy, referral, and education. P&As are in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands), and there is a P&A affiliated with the Native American Consortium which includes the Hopi, Navaho and San Juan SothernPaiute Nations in the Four Corner region of the Southwest. Collectively, the P&A Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States.

Individuals with disabilities compose a disproportionate percentage of jail and prison inmates nationally, yet their needs often go unmet. Prisoners with disabilities often experience an additional layer of punishment in the system that prisoners without disabilities avoid, due to the failure of the system to provide needed accommodations and treatment.

NDRN supports the bill's increased support for anti-recidivism programs and comprehensive risk assessments as useful improvements to the current system.

However, these will only improve the programming prisoners with disabilities receive if disability is specifically included in the bill language. The present bill language does not include a specific consideration of disability in its provisions addressing reentry and recovery planning, and post sentencing risk and needs assessment (Sections 202 through 206). Given the unique needs of prisoners with disabilities, and the demographic realities of the nation's prison population, these additions only make sense.

We are also pleased to see limits on the use of solitary confinement for juveniles. While there are a very few juveniles housed in the federal system, it is important that Congress demonstrates leadership in this area. Solitary confinement can result in three or more negative outcomes. It can be a place that individuals with disabilities are placed when the correctional system fails to provide appropriate services or accommodations for their needs. It can cause mental health needs to worsen and, can in some cases, create mental health needs in individuals who previously had not experienced them. None of these outcomes improves a prisoner's likelihood of a successful transition upon release.

NDRN further supports the compassionate release of elderly prisoners and prisoners with chronic illness. This is a timely and appropriate focus for federal leadership as our prison population ages. Prisoners often have medical needs that go unmet, or are met at greater public expense and with poorer quality than they would if the individuals were treated in their own communities.

Thank you for exercising important federal leadership on these issues. Please contact Dara Baldwin, Senior Public Policy Analyst at [dara.baldwin@ndrn.org](mailto:dara.baldwin@ndrn.org) or 202-408-9514 ext. 102 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Curtis Decker  
Executive Director  
National Disability Rights Network

Cc: U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee members