



National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

January 29, 2016

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Leahy:

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, works on behalf of tens of thousands of survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking across the country, representing state, tribal and national victim advocacy organizations, civil, human, and women's rights advocates, and faith based organizations. We write to support the *Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015* (S. 2123). We welcome this bipartisan reform bill and applaud your sincere effort to repair our nation's broken criminal justice system. Thank you for your leadership in crafting this compromise bill which will, among other things, help to stem the increasing costs of federal incarceration, which currently account for nearly a third of the Department of Justice's discretionary budget.

We particularly support provisions in the proposed legislation that:

- Reform enhanced mandatory minimum sentences for prior drug felons;
- Expand "safety valves" to give judges more flexibility in sentencing;
- Counter recidivism by expanding prison-based reentry programs;
- Limit the use of solitary confinement for juveniles; and
- Permit some who were tried as juveniles in federal court to have their records sealed or expunged.

However, we are concerned about the inclusion of new mandatory minimum provisions in a bill whose express purpose is to reform our criminal justice system. Mandatory minimums interfere with judicial discretion and strip judges of their ability to take special circumstances into account when determining appropriate punishment. Mandatory minimum sentences are particularly harmful to defendants who are victims of domestic and sexual violence, whose criminal activity is frequently the result of coercion. We are also concerned about the message that adding an enhanced penalty to a Violence Against Women Act crime conveys at a time when the National Task Force is assessing the unintended consequences federal laws may have on state pro- and

mandatory arrest laws. With deep respect, we request you remove all new mandatory minimums and enhanced penalties from the bill at this time. We also request that, going forward, you consult with experts in our field who can share their knowledge about the complex issues mandatory minimums create for victims and survivors of domestic violence in order to ensure you adopt provisions that hold offenders accountable while reducing potential harm to survivors.

In closing, we reiterate our thanks for your important bipartisan work to bring criminal justice reform to this point, and we stand ready to assist you in any way we can to secure passage of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee
National Task Force to End Sexual & Domestic Violence