

November 13, 2017

Senator Chuck Grassley
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017 (S. 1917)

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

I am writing on behalf of TASC, Inc. to express our support for S. 1917, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (SRCA). We support this bipartisan legislation because it provides smart and measured solutions that help focus our criminal justice system on violent and repeat offenders and save resources by doing so.

TASC, Inc. is a statewide, independent, not-for-profit agency that provides clinical case management and other services to men, women and adolescents with a variety of social and health-related needs. With more than 300 staff, TASC provides a variety of services across Illinois. In addition to direct client services statewide, TASC and its Center for Health and Justice offer consulting, training, and broad-based public policy solutions nationally and internationally. TASC diverts thousands of people each year from costly government systems into appropriate services and case management in the community – including an average of 2,000 from prison – reducing recidivism and saving Illinois more than \$40M annually.

There are numerous aspects of SRCA are laudable, but we are particularly pleased to see that the bill reduces enhancement penalties for certain non-violent, repeat drug offenders, and limits the firearms enhancement to recidivist offenders. Specifically, eliminating the provision that requires imposition of a mandatory life sentence for three prior drug convictions is a significant step toward sentence proportionality, while concentrating on offenders with prior convictions for serious violent and serious drug felonies.

Along the same lines, SRCA's expansion of the "safety valve" provision to offenders who have more than minor criminal histories is a welcome and long-awaited change, and will allow judges to sentence below a mandatory minimum penalty in cases where it is warranted. Moreover, SRCA's provision that allows the Fair Sentencing Act (FSA) to be applied retroactively, so that nonviolent offenders can receive the benefit of the reduction in the unfair crack and powder cocaine disparity that Congress corrected several years ago, will also allow non-violent offenders to petition for a reduction in their sentence. Trusting our federal judges to examine a case and fairly apply the safety valve or the FSA is wiser than setting forth rigid statutory sentencing schemes that can result in the imposition of unfair sentences.

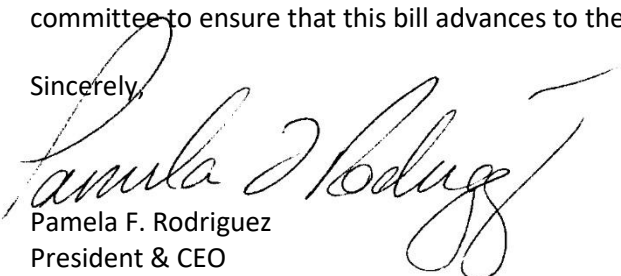
Given the opioid crisis that our country is facing, it is critical to focus on individuals who traffic in lethal substances, like fentanyl. SRCA's creation of a 5 year sentencing enhancement for trafficking of heroin laced with fentanyl addresses this growing problem.

TASC also supports SRCA because of its focus on rehabilitation for prisoners. By requiring that the Department of Justice conduct risk assessments to classify inmates based on their risk of recidivism and assign prison programming accordingly, inmates will be better prepared to re-enter society once they are released from prison. Programming such as work training and education, drug rehabilitation, and faith-based programs are all essential to ensuring that inmates do not return to prison on another charge. The bill also smartly incentivizes inmates to complete such programming by allowing them to earn credits towards early release and alternative custodial placements, such as halfway houses or home confinement.

We also fully support the limitation on the use of solitary confinement for juveniles and the sealing and expungement provisions for non-violent juveniles. The brain research on adolescents and the studies on the harmful effects of solitary confinement more than justify those modest changes. Lastly, TASC welcomes the creation of a criminal justice commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system.

We applaud the authors and sponsors of the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act for what is clearly a forward-looking and smart bill. As an organization focused on treating individuals within their community and expanding alternatives to incarceration, we congratulate this effort to make much-needed changes to our federal criminal justice system. We look forward to working with you and the full committee to ensure that this bill advances to the floor.

Sincerely,



Pamela F. Rodriguez
President & CEO