

**Prepared Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015
Monday, October 19, 2015**

Good afternoon. Today, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on an important bill, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act.

I was pleased to introduce this bill along with a broad bipartisan group of colleagues. Senator Durbin, Senator Cornyn, Senator Lee, Senator Whitehouse, Senator Graham, Senator Schumer, Ranking Member Leahy, Senator Booker, and Senator Scott. And we have now been joined by Senators Tillis and Coons.

It is a truly landmark piece of legislation. It's the result of months of hard work and thoughtful deliberation. It has already been called the most significant criminal justice reform bill in a generation.

And I'm pleased to say that this bill has formed the basis for a companion bill that Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers have more recently introduced in the other body.

Further, President Obama has asked that Congress send him this bill this year, and that if we do so, he will sign it. I am not used to this President calling for the rapid passage of my bills.

I am also pleased that such a large set of organizations from across the political spectrum have endorsed the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act. At this time, I would like to introduce into the record letters of support from the Major Chiefs Association, a group of 41 interfaith community organizations, the Drug Policy Alliance, the American Bar Association, Koch Industries, the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, the American Federation of Government Employees, and the Faith and Freedom Coalition. I will also include letters for the record raising concerns about the bill from the National District Attorneys Association and the FBI Agents Association.

A reason why this bill has been such a success is that it represents a broad agreement among members.

We all agree that stiff sentences can serve an important role in protecting public safety and bringing justice to crime victims. So this bill will preserve the primary mandatory minimums to keep some certainty and uniformity in federal sentences and to encourage criminals to cooperate with law enforcement.

The bill expands some of those enhanced mandatory minimums to criminals with prior violent felonies and state crimes involving the unlawful use of firearms. We even add two new mandatory minimums for crimes involving interstate domestic violence and supplying weapons or other defense materials to prohibited countries or terrorists.

But our current system has produced some specific instances of severe and excessive sentences. And there are elements of the criminal justice system that we agree can and should be improved.

And so we all agree that we need to lower some of the harshest enhanced mandatory minimums. This bill does not eliminate a single mandatory minimum, but it cuts back on a number of the most severe ones.

And we all agree that we can do a better job of targeting those enhanced mandatory sentences to the most serious violent and repeat offenders. And so this bill does just that.

We also all agree that our current system could benefit from giving judges a bit more discretion in sentencing in certain areas. That's why we are expanding the current safety valve.

We also create a second safety valve so that nonviolent offenders who have minor criminal histories or play low-level roles in drug organizations are not improperly swept up by harsher mandatory minimums.

Finally, we all agree that we must improve our prisons and stop the revolving door. So we have agreed to give lower-risk inmates a chance to return to society earlier and with better prospects to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

As I said, this is the biggest criminal justice reform in a generation. But we understand that this bill needs to be considered in context. The Sentencing Commission has already acted to release tens of thousands of inmates, many in a few weeks. There is a heroin epidemic raging across the country. Crime rates that had been falling are starting to rise again. Here in Washington, the police chief has attributed at least some of the rising murder rate to the release of violent inmates from prison after not serving long enough sentences. We need to be very careful when considering legislation that would reduce any criminal penalties. And I believe that we have been very careful to limit the people who gain relief under this bill, while imposing tougher sentences on others.

Now the bill has been nearly unanimously praised, but there is some opposition out there. The bill is unpopular with some federal prosecutors. And I might even agree with some of their criticisms. But if we are actually going to pass reform legislation, none of us is going to be completely happy, and we are not going to do better than this.

I also understand some organizations are calling for more hearings and a delay in the markup of the bill. This is just a thinly veiled attempt to kill the bill. They know we don't have a lot of time if we are going to get this done. We have had hearings on this subject over the years. And none of these groups were active when I was out there, almost alone, fighting off other bills that would have gone too far in reducing mandatory minimum sentences.

But thanks to many people working together, we have produced a historic bill. And I want to end with the idea that this bill is about the United States Senate working again.

Senators from both sides of the aisle and senators with very different perspectives have come together to solve an important problem facing the United States. And I am honored to be a part of it as the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee.