April 23, 2018

Hon. Mitch McConnell  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Chuck Schumer  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Chuck Grassley  
United States Senate  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Diane Feinstein  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
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Hon. Nancy Pelosi  
United States House of Representatives  
233 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Paul Ryan  
United States House of Representatives  
1233 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Bob Goodlatte  
United States House of Representatives  
2309 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Jerry Nadler  
United States House of Representatives  
2109 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515


Dear Speaker, Chairmen, and Leaders:

We write to you as members of Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration. As current and former law enforcement officials, our primary responsibility is, first and foremost, to protect the public safety of our country. We have dedicated our careers to fighting crime and keeping our communities safe. That same duty compels us to speak out today about the critical nature of sentencing reform as part of any criminal justice reform effort in Congress.

Law Enforcement Leaders unites more than 200 current and former police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, U.S. Attorneys, and attorneys general from all 50 states and across the political spectrum. Our mission is to work to reduce crime and incarceration together. To achieve this goal, we focus
on four policy priorities — two of which call for reforming mandatory minimum sentencing laws and improving efforts to assist prisoners reenter society.

Legislation like the Prison Reform and Redemption Act (H.R.3356) and the CORRECTIONS Act (S. 1994) are useful efforts to improve the lives of those in prison. But such efforts should be coupled with efforts to reduce unnecessary incarceration, as it is in the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act.

Today, our oversized prison population costs taxpayers $80 billion annually and draws resources away from law enforcement efforts to fight violent crime. To refocus our resources and enhance public safety, we urge Congress to pass legislation including both comprehensive sentencing reform and reentry programs to reduce recidivism rates.

Lawmakers and Presidents of both parties have taken great strides to reform prison systems and develop more effective reentry programs. We are grateful to the White House for allocating resources towards reducing recidivism, through the creation of the Federal Interagency Council on Crime Prevention and Improving Reentry, and for its support of similar legislative efforts. This concerted effort acknowledges the importance of setting an example of criminal justice reform on the federal level, and the impact federal policies have on state and local criminal justice practice.

However, improving prison conditions and reentry services, on their own, will not adequately solve our high rates of incarceration and recidivism. It will not stop the overuse of incarceration for minor drug-related and low-level, non-violent offenses. To have meaningful reform, we must also address our sentencing laws. As those fighting crime on the frontlines, we know from firsthand experience that it is ineffective to exhaust resources on reducing the rate of recidivism if there is no accompanying effort to reduce the rate at which people unnecessarily enter prison in the first place. For this reason, 67 of our members wrote in support of a previous version of the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act in early 2016.

We ask the Senate, House, and White House to work together to pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act in addition to any reentry legislation. The Act would shorten unnecessarily long sentences for lower-level offenders, a solution that has been shown in other parts of the country to successfully reduce crime and incarceration together.

States have already had much success in such efforts. Following the elimination of prison sentences for certain low-level and non-violent felonies in 2009, Florida’s imprisonment rate fell by 10.4 percent in five years, and its violent and property crime rate by 20 percent. Similarly, South Carolina eliminated mandatory minimums for drug possession in 2010. By 2014, the state’s imprisonment rate fell by 13 percent and the violent crime rate dropped 17 percent. By 2013, the state’s three-year recidivism rate also decreased by 13 percent. California also enacted a number of policies that significantly reduced the state’s incarceration rate, including Proposition 47, which reclassified petty theft and simple, low-level drug possession as misdemeanors. With the savings from reduced incarceration, the state invested it into community-based crime prevention.
programs. These are promising results, which can be replicated at the federal level. If Congress offers national leadership on sentencing reform, other states will also follow suit.

As law enforcement leaders, we want to make clear where we stand: Not only is passing federal mandatory minimum and reentry reform necessary to reduce incarceration, it is also necessary to help police and prosecutors continue to keep crime at its historic lows across the country. We believe the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act will accomplish this goal and respectfully urge Congress to swiftly pass it.

Respectfully yours,

Ronal Serpas
Chairman
Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration
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New Orleans, Louisiana

Art Acevedo
Police Chief
Houston, Texas

Hassan Aden
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