



February 12, 2016

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Stay the Course on Sentencing Reform

Dear Senators Grassley, Leahy, Cornyn and Durbin,

On behalf of the undersigned civil rights and criminal justice organizations working to advance criminal justice reform, we appreciate your leadership on the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 (S.2123), and urge you to stay the course on passing a sentencing reform package in 2016. The bill takes important steps toward addressing some of the racial disparities that have persisted in the federal criminal justice system, as well as the exorbitant cost to the taxpayers caused by the unsustainable and unnecessary growth in the federal prison population.

We believe that the window of opportunity to enact sentencing reform legislation is now. Sentencing reform has received strong bipartisan support from a coalition that includes small-government conservatives and civil rights-minded progressives. The Senate Judiciary Committee's approval of S. 2123 with bipartisan support last October was a major step forward, and we are eager to see the bill passed by both chambers of Congress and signed into law.

Last week, the Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections – a Congressionally-mandated, bipartisan organization – issued a set of “bold recommendations to reform the federal justice system.”ⁱ These reforms include repealing mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses, except for drug kingpins as defined in the “continuing criminal enterprise” statute,ⁱⁱ as well as developing more effective anti-recidivism programs based on treatment of prisoners' individualized risks and needs.ⁱⁱⁱ The findings and recommendations of the Colson Task Force accentuate the urgency of reforming the federal criminal system.

As you well know, the bill as reported out of committee already represents an artful compromise that led to a bipartisan vote. If further modifications to the bill are considered in



order to win support in the full Senate, they must be carefully balanced to ensure that the bill will still serve the critical goals of correcting the wrongs of the past and promoting justice and equality in the future.

We commend the bipartisan effort that has been developed over the past several months to support the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, which should serve as a model for further efforts to solve the problems that have become pervasive in America's justice system. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sakira Cook at cook@civilrights.org or (202) 263-2894. Thank you for your support for this critical legislation, and we urge you continue working to pass sentencing reform legislation this year.

Sincerely,

Karin Johanson
Director, Washington Legislative Office
American Civil Liberties Union

Ira Glasser
President
Drug Policy Alliance

Wade Henderson
President and CEO
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Hilary O. Shelton
Director, Washington Bureau
NAACP

Marc Mauer
Executive Director
The Sentencing Project

ⁱ <http://colsontaskforce.org/uncategorized/congressionally-mandated-task-force-calls-for-bold-transformation-of-federal-corrections-system/>

ⁱⁱ Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections, *Transforming Prisons, Restoring Lives* (January 2016), 22, <http://colsontaskforce.org/final-recommendations/Colson-Task-Force-Final-Recommendations-January-2016.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://colsontaskforce.org/final-recommendations/Colson-Task-Force-Final-Recommendations-January-2016.pdf>