



September 17, 2014

Support the Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2013 (S.1690)

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee Member,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 diverse organizations, we urge you to support the bipartisan Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2013 (S.1690), introduced by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Rob Portman (R-OH). This bill will reauthorize The Second Chance Act, which for the last five years has provided critical funding to government agencies and nonprofits delivering services to recently released individuals. The bill will also expand the number of grant programs available and allocate funding for data collection to increase accountability. Further, this data collection and tracking will also increase evidence-based practices that are most likely to reduce recidivism.

The Leadership Conference believes the impact of this reauthorization act cannot be overstated. Each year in the United States, more than 700,000 people are released from prisons and more than 9 million people are released from jail.ⁱ These individuals face a slew of challenges upon reentry, including lack of access to education, job training, and support systems such as consistent communication with family, which severely diminishes chances of successful reentry. Recidivism rates as a direct result are at a high 43.3 percent.

Specifically, S.1690 allows grant recipients to:

- *Build foundations through education:*

Numerous studies support the findings that “correctional education reduces recidivism and enhances employment outcomes.”ⁱⁱ Indeed, the more education a person has, the more likely he/she is to be employed and the higher his/her earnings will be.ⁱⁱⁱ

- *Support employment and job readiness:*

The stigma of having a criminal record often hinders job opportunities. Therefore, many grant recipients direct their funding toward job training and employment programs, recognizing that employment is a fundamental part of successful reintegration.

- *Foster strong relationships through family services and mentoring:*

Family can be a key factor in successful reentry—some research has shown that people who regularly interact with their families while incarcerated are less likely to recidivate than those who do not.^{iv}

- *Address substance abuse and mental health needs:*

Three out of four people released from prison have a history of substance abuse. A 2009 study of jail populations determined that 16.9 percent of the population had a serious mental illness, which is three to six times the rate for the general population. These issues complicate the process of reentry and need to be addressed as a priority health concern.

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Research confirms that comprehensive, coordinated services can help formerly incarcerated individuals find stable employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism. More importantly, by providing the resources needed for reentry services and policies, the Second Chance Reauthorization Act will continue to allow individuals to transition from prison to society successfully.

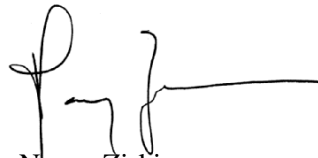
Stakeholders from across the political spectrum agree that this legislation is critical to ensuring the success of returning citizens and the health of our communities. We urge you to support this legislation and vote in favor of it at the Senate Judiciary Committee mark up.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sakira Cook at cook@civilrights.org or (202) 263-2894 or Nancy Zirkin at zirkin@civilrights.org or (202) 263-2880. Thank you for your consideration of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President

ⁱ Sasha Abramsky, *A Second Chance: Charting a New Course for Re-Entry and Criminal Justice Reform* (Washington, DC: The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2013), 4.

ⁱⁱ *Id.* at 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gaes, Gerald. "The Impact of Prison Education Programs on Post-Release Outcomes" at Pg. 11. Reentry Roundtable on Education. Feb. 18, 2008. <http://jjay.cuny.edu/gaestheeffectivenessof-prisoneducationprograms.pdf>

^{iv} Justice Center: The Council of State Governments, comp., *The Second Chance Act* (2014) at 1.