

October 5, 2011

Re: Prioritize and Pass S. 306, the National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2011

Dear Senator:

We write to express our strong support for S. 306, the National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2011, introduced with bipartisan support by Senator Jim Webb. The bill establishes an independent Commission to undertake a comprehensive examination of America's criminal justice system and to make recommendations for fiscally responsible and effective reforms. We urge you to prioritize its quick passage.

The National Criminal Justice Commission would be the first time since the 1967 Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice that we, as a nation, will have taken a comprehensive look at the criminal justice system. The need for a review is clear. At every stage of the criminal justice process – from the events preceding arrest to sentencing to the challenges facing those reentering the community after incarceration – serious problems undermine basic tenets of fairness and equity, as well as the public's expectations for safety. The result is an overburdened, expensive, and often ineffective criminal justice system.

The United States imprisons 2.3 million of its people, a greater percentage than any other nation in the world. A 2007 Pew study found that when the number of Americans on probation or parole are included, the total number of people under criminal justice supervision exceeds 7.3 million (1 in 31 adults), costing taxpayers over \$60 billion annually. The Census Bureau estimates that in 2007, state and local governments spent approximately \$195 billion on criminal justice services. In some states and local governments, criminal justice spending outpaces spending on education.

A top priority of government – federal, state, and local – is to keep the public safe. In this challenging budget environment, we simply cannot afford to keep doing things the way they have always been done. It is vital that we do everything we can to guarantee that criminal justice system expenditures maximize accountability and efficiency, while protecting public safety and the integrity of the criminal justice system.

The National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2011 creates a commission whose members would be appointed by the legislative and executive branch to address these concerns. The Commission would be intergovernmental in nature, consisting of members from every level and facet of government—from mayors and county officials to Governors and state legislators. It would operate solely in an advisory capacity, charged with making non-binding findings and recommendations for governmental and intergovernmental reforms regarding crime prevention and deterrence strategies, cost effectiveness, and ensure the interests of justice at every step of the criminal justice system.

Since its introduction in 2009, support for the Commission has grown significantly. In addition to our organizations, S. 306 has the strong support of a range of criminal justice system

stakeholders, civil rights groups and faith-based organizations, as well as prominent law enforcement organizations and state and local government associations.

We hope Congress will join with this broad coalition in its effort to reform our criminal justice services. The work of the National Criminal Justice Commission is a strong first step. We urge you to prioritize and pass S. 306. Passage of this legislation is an important first step in developing evidence-based and cost-effective solutions to improve our criminal justice system and increase public safety.

Sincerely,

National Organizations and Businesses

AdvoCare
American Civil Liberties Union
American Jail Association
American Probation and Parole Association
Amnesty International USA
Biomass Coordinating Council of the American Council On Renewable Energy
Blacks in Law Enforcement in America
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth
Church of Scientology
Community Action Partnership
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators
Criminon
Disciples Justice Action Network
Drug Policy Alliance
Families Against Mandatory Minimums
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Human Rights Watch
The Inner Voices, Inc.
The Innocence Project
International CURE
Just Detention International
Justice Policy Institute
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Legal Action Center
Mennonite Central Committee U.S., Washington Office
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc.
National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice
National Association of Counties

National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Association of Drug Court Professionals
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators
National Correctional Industries Association
National Criminal Justice Association
National H.I.R.E. Network
National Legal Aid & Defender Association
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
National TASC (Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities)
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
November Coalition Foundation
Open Society Policy Center
Pretrial Justice Institute
Renew the Earth
Safe Streets Arts Foundation
Safer Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation (SAFER)
The Sentencing Project
Treatment Communities of America
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Volunteers of America

State and Local Organizations

Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Scranton, Inc. (PA)
Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CO)
Community Alliance on Prisons (HI)
Council on Crime and Justice (MN)
Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii (HI)
Drug Policy Forum of Texas (TX)
Hawaii State Democratic Women's Caucus (HI)
Independence House (CO)
League of Women Voters of South Carolina (SC)
Major Cities Chiefs Association, Salt Lake City, UT (UT)
New Jersey Association on Correction (NJ)
Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged (VA)
South Carolina Re-Entry Initiative (SC)
St. Leonard's Ministries (IL)