



February 12, 2016

Officers

Chair

Judith L. Lichtman
National Partnership for
Women & Families

Vice Chairs

Jacqueline Pata
National Congress of American Indians
Thomas A. Saenz
Mexican American Legal
Defense and Educational Fund
Hilary Shelton
NAACP

Secretary

Jo Ann Jenkins
AARP

Treasurer

Lee A. Saunders
American Federation of State,
County & Municipal Employees

Board of Directors

Helena Berger
American Association of
People with Disabilities
Cornell William Brooks
NAACP
Kristin Clarke
Lawyers' Committee for
Civil Rights Under Law
Lily Eskelsen Garcia
National Education Association
Marcia D. Greenberger
National Women's Law Center
Chad Griffin
Human Rights Campaign
Linda D. Hallman
AAUW
Mary Kay Henry
Service Employees International Union
Sherrilyn Ifill
NAACP Legal Defense and
Educational Fund, Inc.
Michael B. Keegan
People for the American Way
Samer E. Khalaf
American-Arab
Anti-Discrimination Committee
Elisabeth MacNamara
League of Women Voters of the
United States
Marc Morial
National Urban League
Mee Moua
Asian Americans Advancing Justice |
AAJC
Janet Murguía
National Council of La Raza
Debra Ness
National Partnership for
Women & Families
Terry O'Neill
National Organization for Women
Priscilla Ouchida
Japanese American Citizens League
Rabbi Jonah Pesner
Religious Action Center
Of Reform Judaism
Anthony Romero
American Civil Liberties Union
Shanna Smith
National Fair Housing Alliance
Richard L. Trumka
AFL-CIO
Randi Weingarten
American Federation of Teachers
Dennis Williams
International Union, UAW

Policy and Enforcement

Committee Chair

Michael Lieberman
Anti-Defamation League

President & CEO

Wade J. Henderson
Executive Vice President & COO
Karen McGill Lawson

Senator Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
1st & C Street, NE
Washington, DC 20510

Senator John Cornyn
Majority Whip
517 Hart Senate Office Building
2nd & C Street, NE
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
1st & C Street, NE
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Dick Durbin
Minority Whip
711 Hart Senate Office Building
2nd & C Street, NE
Washington, DC 20510

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>