

October 21, 2009

Co-Sponsor S.714 the National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2009

Dear Senator:

We write urging you to cosponsor S. 714, the National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2009, recently introduced with bipartisan support by Senator Jim Webb. The bill establishes an independent Commission and charges it with the responsibility of initiating a comprehensive examination of America's criminal justice system and making recommendations for fiscally responsible and effective reforms.

The need for a comprehensive review is clear. At every stage of the criminal justice process – from the events preceding arrest 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. Consider just a few examples of the problems we face:

The United States imprisons 2.3 million of its people, a greater percentage than any other nation in the world. When the number of Americans on probation or parole are included, the total number of people under criminal justice supervision exceeds 7,300,000, 1 in every 31 adults, costing taxpayers over \$57 billion annually. Over-reliance on incarceration and long sentences is expensive, unsafe for inmates and corrections employees alike, and unlikely to achieve the goal of rehabilitation.

The impact of this level of incarceration on all our communities, urban and rural, is grave as potential wage earners are unable to care for their families, pay taxes and be productive members of the community. Even after being released and "paying their debt to society," the stigma of incarceration lasts a lifetime as formerly incarcerated people must overcome discrimination in the form of barriers to obtaining jobs, housing, and financial aid for educational purposes. It should come as little surprise that two thirds of formerly incarcerated people will be rearrested and half will be reincarcerated within three years of their release.

Current practices have been devastating to minority and vulnerable communities. Minorities make up a disproportionately large share of the incarcerated population: one of every three black males and one of every six Hispanic males born today can expect to spend time in prison. Comparatively, one in seventeen white males will spend time in prison. These racial disparities hurt everyone because they undermine community confidence in both law enforcement and the courts.

Vulnerable populations become even more vulnerable when they go through the criminal justice system. For example, approximately 10,000 young people are held in prisons and jails with adult offenders. Additionally, high rates of mental illness among incarcerated youth and adults further complicate the workings of the criminal justice system. Four times as many persons with mental illness are incarcerated than are in mental health hospitals. Prisoners are two to four times more likely than the general population to be schizophrenic, depressed, bipolar, or suffering from post-

traumatic stress disorder. Correctional administrators are struggling under the burden of managing these special-needs populations.

The National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2009 creates a commission whose members would be appointed by the legislative and executive branch. The Commission would be charged with the task of examining the criminal justice system, identifying both its strengths and weaknesses, and then offering recommendations to the Congress designed to: responsibly reduce the overall incarceration rate; lower violence and crime rates; improve federal and local responses to international and domestic gang violence; restructure our approach to drug policy; improve the treatment of mental illness; improve prison administration; and establish a system for reintegrating formerly incarcerated people.

We urge you to co-sponsor S. 714. 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 Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Civil Liberties Union
Americans for Democratic Action
American Humanist Association
American Jail Association
The Association for Behavior Analysis International, Special Interest Group in Crime, Delinquency, and Forensic Behavior Analysis
American Probation and Parole Association
Attention Deficit Disorder Association
Biomass Coordinating Council of the American Council On Renewable Energy
Carnevale Foundation
Church of Scientology
The Coalition for Juvenile Justice
College Parents of America
Community Action Partnership
The Convict Criminology Group
Corporation for Supportive Housing
The Correctional Association of New York
Correctional Education Association
Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators
Criminon International
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants - Chapter for Veterans
Disciples Justice Action Network
Drug Policy Alliance
Drug Reform Coordination Network

Families Against Mandatory Minimums
FedCURE
Friends Committee on National Legislation
The Fortune Society, The David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy
Goodwill Industries
Haymarket Center
Human Rights Watch
The Innocence Project
The Inner Voices
Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
International Community Corrections Association
International CURE -- Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants
Just Detention International
Law Enforcement Against Prohibition
Leaders in Community Alternatives, Inc. (national headquarters, CA)
Legal Action Center
Marijuana Policy Project
Methadone Support Organization
NAACP
The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National African American Drug Policy Coalition
National Alliance of Faith and Justice
National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Police Association
National Center on Institutions and Alternatives, Inc.
National Congress of Black Women, Inc.
National Correctional Industries Association
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
National Council on Crime and Delinquency, NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women
National Criminal Justice Association
National Disability Rights Network
National Employment Law Project
National HIRE Network
National Institute for the Study, Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Trauma
National Legal Aid & Defender Association
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
North American Family Institute
November Coalition
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Washington Office
Providence Service Corporation (national headquarters, AZ)
Safe Streets Arts Foundation
The Safer Foundation
The Sentencing Project

Sex Abuse Treatment Alliance and CURE-SORT
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Therapeutic Communities of America
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
The WestCare Foundation
Women of Reform Judaism

State/Local Organizations and Businesses

Alston Wilkes Society (SC)
ATTIC Correctional Services, Inc (WI, MN)
Benedict Center (WI)
Catholic Social Services of Lackawanna County, Diocese of Scranton (PA)
Center for Community Initiatives (FL)
Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions School of Professional and Community
Development Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York (NY)
The Children's Campaign, Inc. (FL)
The Children's Trust (FL)
Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CO)
Community Resources for Justice (MA)
The Correctional Association of New York (NY)
Delaware Center for Justice (DE)
Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii (HI)
Drug Policy Forum of Texas (TX)
The Eagle Group (MA, FL, DC)
Empowerment Resources Inc. (FL)
Family Justice (NY)
Fathers, Families In Transition (FFIT) (IL)
Florida Network of Youth and Family Services (FL)
Get Back Up, Inc. (MI)
Hamden Consulting (FL)
Hawaii State Democratic Women's Caucus (HI)
Independence House (CO)
Jubilee Jobs, Inc. (DC)
Justice Maryland (MD)
Justice Works! (WA)
Living Room, Inc. (GA)
Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (DC)
The Messages Project (VA)
Missouri Recovery Network (MO)
NAACP Prison Project Alabama (AL)
National Justice Coalition (AL)
New Beginnings Treatment Center, Inc. (AZ)
New Bottom Line Campaign (AL)

New Jersey Association on Correction (NJ)
The Ordinary People Society T.O.P.S . (AL)
PACE Center for Girls Inc. (FL)
Passion Flower Productions, Inc. (FL)
Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PA)
Pennsylvania Prison Society (PA)
Pioneer Human Services (WA)
Prisoners & Families for Equal Rights & Justice (VA)
Prison Families of New York, Inc. (NY)
The Prison Show (TX)
Prodigal Child Project (AL)
Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged (VA)
Restoring Dignity, Inc. (MI)
Rodney & Etter, LLC (LA)
S.U.R.E.'s Success On pREvENTRY – NOLA (LA)
Safer Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation (CO)
South Carolina Re-Entry Initiative (SC)
St. Leonard's Ministries (IL)
Stand Up for What's Right and Just (DE)
Turn Around Village, LTD (LA)
Voice of the Ex-offender (LA)
Volunteers of America Delaware Valley (NJ)
4justicenow, Fl, NY, NJ chapter of the Action Committee for Women in Prison (FL, NY, NJ)
622 Communities Partnership, Inc. / Minnesota Affiliate of the National Council on
Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (MN)