

April 25, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders Reid and McConnell:

We are writing to urge you to oppose inclusion of any new mandatory minimum sentencing provisions in the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). If such provisions remain in the Senate bill after passage, we ask that you seek to remove them when the bill is negotiated with the House version.

We believe that reducing the level of violence directed at women is an extremely worthwhile objective and an issue of national concern. We recognize and appreciate that many of the proposals contained in the S. 1925, the Senate VAWA proposal, enjoy broad bipartisan support, as well as the overwhelming support of the American public.

We do not believe, however, that new mandatory minimum sentencing laws are an appropriate or cost-effective way to combat violence against women. The best way to punish violent offenders is to permit courts to consider the individual circumstances of each offense and offender, and to impose a proportionate sentence. We have no confidence that one-size-fits-all sentencing schemes will provide the degree of individualized justice the American public deserves and expects.

We are aware that the S. 1925 already contains a new, counterproductive mandatory minimum that applies to aggravated sexual assault. This mandatory minimum was added during Judiciary Committee consideration, and we are hopeful that it will be removed as the bill moves through the legislative process. We are concerned that some members of the Senate might be motivated to add additional mandatory minimum provisions during Senate floor consideration of S. 1925. We strongly urge you to oppose the adoption of any new mandatory minimums.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and please do not hesitate to contact any of us if you should have any questions.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
ASISTA Immigration Assistance
Break the Cycle
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth
Casa de Esperanza
Centro de Ayuda Legal para Imigrantes (CA)
CONNECT (NY)
Empire Justice Center (NY)

Families Against Mandatory Minimums
Futures Without Violence
Holy Cross Ministries (UT)
Human Rights Watch
inMotion (NY)
Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
International Community Corrections Association (ICCA)
International Institute of the Bay Area (CA)
Jewish Women International
Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Laura Fernandez Immigration Law (WI)
Law Offices of Alisa Kaufman (CA)
Law Offices of Jay S. Marks (MD)
Legal Action Center
Legal Momentum
Luca L Fagundes, Attorney & Counselor at Law (WI)
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NY)
The National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc.
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL)
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Capital Area Union Retirees
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs
National Congress of American Indians Task Force on Violence Against Women
National Council of Jewish Women
National Congress of Negro Women
National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild
National Legal Aid & Defender Association
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault
National Organization for Women
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (WA)
Paso Del Norte Civil Rights Project (TX)
Refugio del Rio Grande, Inc. (TX)
Ross Silverman LLP (MA)
Russell Immigration Law Firm
Scott D. Pollock & Associates, P.C. (IL)
The Sentencing Project

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Van Der Hout, Brigagliano & Nightingale, LLP (CA)
Women of Color Network
YWCA USA

Cc: United States Senate