November 13, 2018

Hon. Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Police Perspective: FIRST STEP Act (S. 2795) & Sentencing Reform

Dear President Trump:

I write to you today as Executive Director of Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration, a bipartisan group of more than 200 current and former law enforcement officials.

Today, our nation faces new criminal justice challenges, including a rise in opioid overdoses, an uptick in homicides in some cities, and strained police-community relations. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, we as leaders in law enforcement feel compelled to share our views on how passing prison and sentencing reform together is vital to keeping our nation safe.

First, I wanted to share our briefing memo explaining how the FIRST STEP Act and sentencing reform will improve public safety. Americans trust us, as law enforcement officers, to both secure the safety of their communities and advise policymakers on how to advance that goal. We hope this information helps ease any concerns surrounding the bill. Our position is also in line with that of the Fraternal Order of Police, which recently endorsed bipartisan efforts toward justice reform.

Second, I wanted to share our previous letter supporting the FIRST STEP Act and sentencing reform sent to leaders in Congress, explaining the necessity of passing sentencing and prison reform together to reduce recidivism and increase fairness. Over 60 of our members signed onto this letter, writing everywhere from Virginia to New Orleans to Iowa, to share their views. I have expressed similar views in the The Hill, with Washington Police Chief Peter Newsham.

We are grateful for your unwavering leadership in prioritizing public safety and the critical issues facing law enforcement. I hope we can work together toward bipartisan reforms.

Respectfully yours,

Ronal Serpas
Executive Director, Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration
Former Police Superintendent, New Orleans, Louisiana
Former Police Chief, Nashville, Tennessee
RE: FIRST STEP Act (S. 2795) & Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S.1917)

Dear Leader McConnell and Senator Schumer:

I write today to express Law Enforcement Leaders’ continued support for bipartisan federal criminal justice reform and urge Congress to swiftly pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017 (S. 1917, “SRCA”) and the FIRST STEP Act (S. 2795) together.

The SRCA contains key sentencing provisions that will fix unproductive mandatory minimum sentences that drain finite law enforcement, prosecutorial, and prison resources away from fighting violent crime. The FIRST STEP Act will improve prison conditions and reentry programs thereby increasing opportunities for men and women to successfully reenter society.

Too often, ineffective and outdated federal mandatory minimum sentencing laws send offenders to prison for far too long. Many such prisoners are struggling with addiction or mental health issues, which prison does not address. As police and prosecutors are forced to spend their time on low-level, non-violent offenses, we miss the opportunity to go after the most dangerous threats to public safety — and taxpayers foot the bill for that unnecessary incarceration. To be serious about public safety, we must recalibrate how long offenders spend in prison and break the cycle of recidivism.

I have attached a letter from more than 60 members of Law Enforcement Leaders detailing law enforcement’s support of federal sentencing and prison reform. Both are required to correct the inefficiencies in our justice system and better serve the public. That letter explained our concerns that the Prison Reform and Redemption Act (H.R. 3356) and the CORRECTIONS Act (S. 1994) were both insufficient, as they lacked any sentencing reform component. That same concern applies to the FIRST STEP Act.

I urge Congress to take this opportunity to pass substantive changes that strengthen our criminal justice system. Thank you for your leadership on the important criminal justice issues facing the country today.

Respectfully yours,

Ronal Serpas
Executive Director, Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration
Former Police Superintendent, New Orleans, Louisiana

Cc: Senate Judiciary Committee
April 23, 2018

Hon. Mitch McConnell  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Chuck Schumern  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Chuck Grassley  
United States Senate  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Diane Feinstein  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Nancy Pelosi  
United States House of Representatives  
233 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Paul Ryan  
United States House of Representatives  
1233 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Bob Goodlatte  
United States House of Representatives  
2309 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Jerry Nadler  
United States House of Representatives  
2109 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515


Dear Speaker, Chairmen, and Leaders:

We write to you as members of Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration. As current and former law enforcement officials, our primary responsibility is, first and foremost, to protect the public safety of our country. We have dedicated our careers to fighting crime and keeping our communities safe. That same duty compels us to speak out today about the critical nature of sentencing reform as part of any criminal justice reform effort in Congress.

Law Enforcement Leaders unites more than 200 current and former police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, U.S. Attorneys, and attorneys general from all 50 states and across the political spectrum. Our mission is to work to reduce crime and incarceration together. To achieve this goal, we focus
on four policy priorities — two of which call for reforming mandatory minimum sentencing laws and improving efforts to assist prisoners reenter society.

Legislation like the Prison Reform and Redemption Act (H.R.3356) and the CORRECTIONS Act (S. 1994) are useful efforts to improve the lives of those in prison. But such efforts should be coupled with efforts to reduce unnecessary incarceration, as it is in the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act.

Today, our oversized prison population costs taxpayers $80 billion annually and draws resources away from law enforcement efforts to fight violent crime. To refocus our resources and enhance public safety, we urge Congress to pass legislation including both comprehensive sentencing reform and reentry programs to reduce recidivism rates.

Lawmakers and Presidents of both parties have taken great strides to reform prison systems and develop more effective reentry programs. We are grateful to the White House for allocating resources towards reducing recidivism, through the creation of the Federal Interagency Council on Crime Prevention and Improving Reentry, and for its support of similar legislative efforts. This concerted effort acknowledges the importance of setting an example of criminal justice reform on the federal level, and the impact federal policies have on state and local criminal justice practice.

However, improving prison conditions and reentry services, on their own, will not adequately solve our high rates of incarceration and recidivism. It will not stop the overuse of incarceration for minor drug-related and low-level, non-violent offenses. To have meaningful reform, we must also address our sentencing laws. As those fighting crime on the frontlines, we know from firsthand experience that it is ineffective to exhaust resources on reducing the rate of recidivism if there is no accompanying effort to reduce the rate at which people unnecessarily enter prison in the first place. For this reason, 67 of our members wrote in support of a previous version of the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act in early 2016.¹

We ask the Senate, House, and White House to work together to pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act in addition to any reentry legislation. The Act would shorten unnecessarily long sentences for lower-level offenders, a solution that has been shown in other parts of the country to successfully reduce crime and incarceration together.²

States have already had much success in such efforts. Following the elimination of prison sentences for certain low-level and non-violent felonies in 2009, Florida’s imprisonment rate fell by 10.4 percent in five years, and its violent and property crime rate by 20 percent.³ Similarly, South Carolina eliminated mandatory minimums for drug possession in 2010. By 2014, the state’s imprisonment rate fell by 13 percent and the violent crime rate dropped 17 percent.⁴ By 2013, the state’s three-year recidivism rate also decreased by 13 percent.⁵ California also enacted a number of policies that significantly reduced the state’s incarceration rate, including Proposition 47, which reclassified petty theft and simple, low-level drug possession as misdemeanors.⁶ With the savings from reduced incarceration, the state invested it into community-based crime prevention...
programs. These are promising results, which can be replicated at the federal level. If Congress offers national leadership on sentencing reform, other states will also follow suit.

As law enforcement leaders, we want to make clear where we stand: Not only is passing federal mandatory minimum and reentry reform necessary to reduce incarceration, it is also necessary to help police and prosecutors continue to keep crime at its historic lows across the country. We believe the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act will accomplish this goal and respectfully urge Congress to swiftly pass it.

Respectfully yours,

Ronal Serpas
Chairman
Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration
Former Police Superintendent
New Orleans, Louisiana

Art Acevedo
Police Chief
Houston, Texas

Hassan Aden
Executive Fellow
Police Foundation
Former Police Chief
Greenville, North Carolina

Cedric Alexander
Former Police Chief
DeKalb County, Georgia
Former President
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives

Eric Atkinson
Chief of Police
Menomonie, Wisconsin

Jim Bueermann
President
Police Foundation
Former Police Chief
Redlands, California
Chris Burbank  
Former Police Chief  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Zachary Carter  
Corporation Counsel  
New York, New York  
Former U.S. Attorney  
Eastern District of New York

John Chisholm  
District Attorney  
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

John Choi  
County Attorney  
Ramsey County, Minnesota

William Citty  
Chief of Police  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Jerry Clayton  
Sheriff  
Washtenaw County, Michigan

Brendan Cox  
Director of Policing Strategies  
LEAD National Support Bureau  
Former Police Chief  
Albany, New York

Dwayne Crawford  
Executive Director  
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives

Ron Davis  
Former Director  
U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)  
Former Police Chief  
East Palo Alto, California
Allison DeFoor  
Former Sheriff  
Monroe County, Florida

John Diaz  
Former Police Chief  
Seattle, Washington

Richard Doran  
Former Attorney General  
Florida

Paul Fitzgerald  
Sheriff  
Story County, Iowa  
Former President  
National Sheriffs' Association

Neill Franklin  
Executive Director  
Law Enforcement Action Partnership  
Former Police Commander  
Baltimore, Maryland

Mike Freeman  
County Attorney  
Hennepin County, Minnesota

George Gascon  
District Attorney  
San Francisco County, California  
Former Police Chief  
San Francisco, California

Sim Gill  
District Attorney  
Salt Lake County, Utah

Barry Grissom  
Former U.S. Attorney  
District of Kansas
Gregory Hamilton
Former Sheriff
Travis County, Texas

Hal Hardin
Former U.S. Attorney
Middle District of Tennessee
Former Judge
Davidson County, Second Circuit Court

Brent D. Harris
City Prosecutor
Flagstaff, Arizona

Timothy Heaphy
Former U.S. Attorney
Western District of Virginia

Peter Holmes
City Attorney
Seattle, Washington

Walter Holton
Former U.S. Attorney
Middle District of North Carolina

John Hummel
District Attorney
Deschutes County, Oregon

Keith Humphrey
Chief of Police
Norman, Oklahoma

Joseph Jaffe
Former District Attorney
Sullivan County, New York

James E. Johnson
Former Undersecretary for Enforcement
U.S. Department of the Treasury
Kevin Joyce
Sheriff
Cumberland County, Maine

Gil Kerlikowske
Former Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Former Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy

George Kral
Chief of Police
Toledo, Ohio

David LaBahn
President and CEO
Association of Prosecuting Attorneys

Chris Magnus
Chief of Police
Tucson, Arizona

David Mahoney
Sheriff
Dane County, Wisconsin

Charles McClelland
Former Police Chief
Houston, Texas

Cameron McLay
Former Police Chief
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Joel Merry
Sheriff
Sagadahoc County, Maine

Stephanie Morales
Commonwealth’s Attorney
Portsmouth, Virginia
Peter Newsham
Chief of Police
Washington, District of Columbia

Matt Orwig
Former U.S. Attorney
Eastern District of Texas

Richard J. Pocker
Former U.S. Attorney
District of Nevada

Timothy Purdon
Former U.S. Attorney
District of North Dakota

Rick Raemisch
Executive Director
Colorado Department of Corrections
Former Sheriff
Dane County, Wisconsin

Gordon Ramsay
Chief of Police
Wichita, Kansas

Jill Ravitch
District Attorney
Sonoma County, California

Richard Roszman
Former U.S. Attorney
Eastern District of Michigan

Daniel Satterberg
Prosecuting Attorney
King County, Washington

Michael Sauschuck
Chief of Police
Portland, Maine
William Scott
Chief of Police
San Francisco, California

Susan Segal
City Attorney
Minneapolis, Minnesota

David Steingraber
Former Police Chief
Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

Darrel Stephens
Former Executive Director
Major Cities Chiefs’ Association
Former Police Chief
Charlotte Mecklenburg, North Carolina

Donald Stern
Former U.S. Attorney
District of Massachusetts

Brett Tolman
Former U.S. Attorney
District of Utah

Cyrus Vance
District Attorney
New York County, New York

John Walsh
Former U.S. Attorney
District of Colorado


For change in the imprisonment rate see *Corrections Statistical Analysis Tool*, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, IMPRISONMENT RATES, 1978-2016, https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbd (showing a 2010 imprisonment rate of 492 and 2014 rate of 428); For change in the violent crime rate compare *UCR Data Online*, UNIF. CRIME REPORTING STATISTICS, http://www.ucrdatatool.gov/index.cfm (providing crime statistics from 1960 to 2012 and showing the South Carolina violent crime rate was 602.2 per 100,000 people in 2010) with *UCR Data Online, Crime in the United States*, 2014 tbl.5 (2015), https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.2014 (showing the South Carolina violent crime rate was 497.7 per 100,000 people in 2014).

