May 9, 2018

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

Hon. Robert Goodlatte  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2309 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

Hon. Jerry Nadler  
U.S. House of Representative  
2109 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Kevin McCarthy  
United States House of Representatives  
2421 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Law Enforcement Perspective on the FIRST STEP Act

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Chairman Goodlatte, and Ranking Member Nadler:

I write to represent the views of Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration, a bipartisan group of more than 200 current and former law enforcement officials. Our mission, and our experience on the front lines of America’s fight against crime, both compel us to speak out in support of policies that will keep the public safe, and to share concerns about those that will not.

Toward that end, I urge the House of Representatives and the House Judiciary Committee to continue working toward comprehensive, bipartisan sentencing reform — even as you move closer to passing prison reform legislation.

Today, the Judiciary Committee takes up the FIRST STEP Act. The bill is in many ways an improvement on its predecessor, the Prison Reform and Redemption Act, H.R. 3356.

However, we have the same concerns about the FIRST STEP Act as we did about the previous legislation. Reducing recidivism through programming and other in-prison services is vital, and the FIRST STEP Act marks progress toward that goal. But any such attempt to reduce recidivism will
be incomplete without addressing the rate at which people unnecessarily enter prison in the first place. For that reason, we believe that the FIRST STEP Act should not pass alone, but as a part of a broader push toward comprehensive criminal justice reform — one that includes updating our outdated federal sentencing laws. The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (“SRCA”), now pending in the Senate as S.1917, would be a worthy companion to that effort.

Over 60 of our members expressed these views more fully in our previous letter of April 23, 2018. That letter is re-attached for the Committee’s convenience.¹

Passing comprehensive sentencing reform — such as the SRCA — will allow law enforcement officers nationwide to focus their efforts on combatting the most dangerous offenders, and support their work to keep crime at record lows. It is a necessary complement to any effort to reduce recidivism among currently incarcerated offenders.

We respectfully urge Congress to take up and pass both prison reform and the SRCA.

Respectfully yours,

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

cc: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Attachment: Law Enforcement Leaders letter of April 23, 2018

April 23, 2018

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

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

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

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

Hon. Paul Ryan
United States House of Representatives
1233 Longworth 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.

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.

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. 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. By 2013, the state’s three-year recidivism rate also decreased by 13 percent. 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. 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 Rossman  
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


