June 16, 2015

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
United States House of Representatives
2309 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers
United States House of Representatives
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515


Dear Chairmen Grassley and Goodlatte and Ranking Members Leahy and Conyers:

As former judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials, we write to express our support for critical reforms to federal sentencing contained in the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2015 (SSA), S.502/H.R.920. This bill is an important step in promoting public safety and addressing unintended and expensive consequences of existing federal sentencing laws.

Nationwide, law enforcement has made significant progress in curbing violent crime in our communities. At the federal level, we trust Congress to address the parts of our sentencing policies that are simply not working. Presently, mandatory minimum drug sentences unnecessarily apply to a broad sweep of lower level offenders. These include low-level, nonviolent people whose involvement in the offense is driven by addiction, mental illness, or both. Drug offenders are the largest group of federal offenders sentenced each year, now comprising nearly half of the federal prison population. Moreover, individuals most likely to receive a mandatory minimum sentence were street-level dealers, not serious and major drug dealers, kingpins, and importers. Indeed, of the 22,000 federal drug offenders last year, only seven percent had a leadership role in the crime and 84 percent did not possess or use guns or weapons. The U.S. Sentencing Commission and other experts have found little deterrent value in sentencing low-level offenders to lengthy mandatory minimum prison terms.

Additionally, over the past three decades, our spending on federal incarceration has increased by over 1100 percent. Despite this massive investment by taxpayers, federal prisons are now at 128 percent of their capacity, undermining staff and inmate safety and prisoner rehabilitation, as well as reducing the resources available for law enforcement and crime prevention. Incarceration and detention costs have nearly doubled over the last ten years, with the Bureau of Prisons’ (BOP) budget at its current level of $7.2 billion in the President’s Fiscal Year 2016 budget request. As a nation, we are expending enormous amounts of money, but failing to keep pace with our growing prison population.

Maintaining the status quo in federal sentencing policy is both fiscally imprudent and a threat to public safety. We are deeply concerned that spending on incarceration has jeopardized funding for some of our most important law enforcement priorities. The BOP budget now accounts for
approximately a quarter of the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) discretionary budget, potentially undermining other DOJ law enforcement priorities. Indeed, in 2014, the BOP’s budget grew at almost twice the rate of the rest of the Department of Justice. With more resources going to incarcerate nonviolent offenders, funding for federal investigators and prosecutors is threatened. U.S. Attorneys’ Offices and the Drug Enforcement Administration have already lost hundreds of positions and resources for state and local law enforcement have significantly decreased. Law enforcement will continue to maximize its resources to keep our communities safe, but Congress created our sentencing scheme and needs to act to help solve these problems.

The SSA reflects our concerns and embodies measured, bipartisan reforms. It does not eliminate mandatory minimums, but its modest expansion of the existing federal “safety valve,” coupled with the reduction of some mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses – without changing existing statutory maximums – allows courts to make individualized assessments in nonviolent drug cases. This maintains consistency in sentencing for drug-related offenses, but allows for discretion to give less lengthy sentences in a narrow subset of cases. In the most recent U.S. Sentencing Commission survey of federal judges, a significant majority supported the modest expansion of the safety valve. It permits federal judges to determine, on a case-by-case basis, when the harshest penalties should apply.

The bill also promotes fairness and consistency by acknowledging the numerous federal prisoners who are serving sentences imposed prior to the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, legislation that was unanimously passed in the Senate and the House. The Act reduced a decades-long sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine. The SSA would allow certain inmates sentenced under the old regime to petition courts and prosecutors for sentence reductions consistent with the Fair Sentencing Act and current law. This addresses an unjust disparity in sentences and could save more than $1 billion in incarceration costs.

We appreciate your leadership in seeking bipartisan solutions to address our nation’s widely acknowledged problems with over-incarceration. Undoubtedly, addressing excessive mandatory minimums is an important piece of necessary reforms. We join the many other bipartisan and law enforcement groups supporting the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2015, and we are pleased to extend our help as you work with your colleagues in the Senate and the House to pursue reform in federal sentencing.

cc: The Honorable Richard “Dick” Durbin
    The Honorable Michael “Mike” Lee
    The Honorable Raúl Labrador
    The Honorable Robert “Bobby” Scott
Signatories as of June 16, 2015:

Elizabeth K. Ainslie
Former Federal Prosecutor

Lee Altschuler
Former Chief Assistant United States Attorney, Silicon Valley Division, Northern District of California; Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of California

Harry Lee Anstead
Former Chief Justice, Florida Supreme Court; Former Judge, Florida 4th Circuit Court of Appeal

Shirley Baccus-Lobel
Former Trial Attorney, Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Main Justice; Former Federal Prosecutor Northern District of Texas; Former Assistant United States Attorney, Criminal Chief, First Assistant, Northern District of Texas

Bob Barr
Former Member of Congress (R-GA); Former United States Attorney, Northern District of Georgia; Anti-drug coordinator for Department of Justice, Southeastern United States; Former CIA analyst

William Bassler
Former Judge, United States District Court for the District of New Jersey; Former Judge, Superior Court for the State of New Jersey

Richard S. Berne
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District of New York; Former Assistant U.S. Attorney, Northern District of California

Herbert Better
Former First Assistant United States Attorney and Court-appointed United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Robert Bonsib
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Frank Bowman
Former Deputy District Attorney, Denver; Former Deputy Chief of the United States Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida; Former Special Counsel to the United States Sentencing Commission; Former advisor to the Criminal Law Committee of the United States Judicial Conference

James Brady
Former United States Attorney, Western District of Michigan

William G. Broaddus
Former Attorney General, Virginia
Jim Brosnahan  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona; Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Northern California

Robert Bundy  
Former United States Attorney, District of Alaska

Arthur L. Burnett, Sr.  
Former Magistrate Judge, United States District Court, District of Columbia; Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Columbia; Former Trial Attorney, United States Department of Justice, Criminal Division

Michael Burrage  
Former Chief Judge, United States District Court, Eastern District of Oklahoma; Former Judge, United States District Court, Eastern, Northern and Western Districts of Oklahoma

A. Bates Butler III  
Former United States Attorney, District of Arizona; Former First Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona

Edward Cahn  
Former Chief Judge, United States District Court, Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Erwin Chemerinsky  
Dean and Distinguished Professor of Law, University of California, Irvine

Robert J. Cleary  
Former United States Attorney, District of New Jersey; Former United States Attorney, Southern District of Illinois; Former Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of New York; Former First Assistant U.S. Attorney in the District of New Jersey

U.W. Clemon  
Former Chief Judge, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama

David H. Coar  
Former Judge, United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois

Sue Bell Cobb  
Former Chief Justice, Alabama Supreme Court

Barry Coburn  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Columbia

W. J. Michael Cody  
Former Attorney General for the State of Tennessee; Former United States Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee
Bill Cummings
Former United States Attorney, Eastern District of Virginia

Robert J. Del Tufo
Former Attorney General, New Jersey; Former United States Attorney, District of New Jersey; Former First Assistant Attorney General, District of New Jersey

Morton Denlow
Former Magistrate Judge, United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois

Michael Dettmer
Former United States Attorney, Western District of Michigan

Oliver E. Diaz
Former Justice, Mississippi Supreme Court; Former Judge, Mississippi Court of Appeals; Former City Attorney, City of D'Iberville

Nancy J. Diehl
Former Prosecutor, Wayne County, Michigan

Joe diGenova
Former United States Attorney, District of Columbia

W. Thomas Dillard
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District of Tennessee; Former United States Magistrate Judge, Eastern District of Tennessee; Former United States Attorney, Northern District of Florida

Joseph J. Duffy
Former First Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Thomas A. Durkin
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Mark Earley
Former Attorney General, Virginia

Bruce J. Einhorn
Former Judge, Los Angeles Immigration Court; Former Chief of Litigation, Office of Special Investigations, Department of Justice

Tyrone C. Fahner
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois; Former Attorney General of Illinois

James P. Fieweger
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

John Flannery
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of New York
Mark A. Flessner  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Norman Fletcher  
Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia; Former Special Assistant Attorney General, Georgia;  
Former Attorney, Walker County, Georgia

Kobie Flowers  
Former Trial Attorney, United States Department of Justice, Criminal Section

Stephen G. Frye  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Kentucky

Royal Furgeson  
Former Senior United States District Judge, Northern District of Texas

John N. Gallo  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Bennett L. Gershman  
Former Prosecutor, Manhattan District Attorney’s Office

Nancy Gertner  
Former Judge, United States District Court, District of Massachusetts

Cynthia Giacchetti  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Lawrence S. Goldman  
Former Assistant District Attorney, New York County, NY

Daniel F. Goldstein  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Jonathan L. Goldstein  
Former United States Attorney, District of New Jersey; Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of New Jersey; Former Special Trial Attorney, United States Department of Justice

Isabel Gomez  
Former Director, Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission; Former Judge, Hennepin County Circuit Court, Minnesota

Steven Gordon  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Columbia

Karla Gray  
Former Chief Justice, Montana Supreme Court
Joseph R. Grodin  
Former Associate Justice, California Supreme Court

Timothy M. Gunning  
Assistant State’s Attorney for Baltimore County, MD 1991-1996

Scott Harshbarger  
Former Attorney General, Massachusetts; Former District Attorney, Middlesex County, Massachusetts

Joseph W. Hatchett  
Former Chief Judge, United States Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit; Former Judge, United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit; Justice Supreme Court of Florida

Donald H. Heller  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District of California

Martin Himeles  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Renée Cardwell Hughes  
Former Judge, Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District, Philadelphia; Former Member, Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission

William Hughes  
Former Chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime; Former First Assistant Prosecutor in Cape May County

Glenn Ivey  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Columbia; Former State's Attorney, Prince George's County, Maryland

Bruce Jacob  
Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law, Stetson University College of Law; Former Assistant Attorney General, Florida

Wallace B. Jefferson  
Former Chief Justice of Texas Supreme Court

Marc Jimenez  
Former United States Attorney, Southern District of Florida

Erlinda O. Johnson  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of New Mexico
Juliette Kayyem  
Former Assistant Secretary, Department of Homeland Security; Former Member, National Commission on Terrorism (The Bremer Commission); Former Legal Advisor to the Attorney General, Department of Justice

Leon Kellner  
Former United States Attorney, Southern Florida; Former Chief, Civil Division, Department of Justice

Michael H. King  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Lawrence Korb  
Former Director, Center for Public Policy Education, The Brookings Institution.

Miriam A. Krinsky  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Central District of California

Fern M. Laethem  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District of California

Thomas D. Lambros  
Former Chief Judge, United States District Court, Northern District of Ohio; Former Judge, Jefferson County Court of Common Pleas; Former Army Judge Advocate General

Scott R. Lassar  
Former United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Laurie L. Levenson  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Central District of California

Steven Levin  
Former Deputy Criminal Chief, United States Attorney’s Office, District of Maryland; Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Ronald H. Levine  
Former Chief, Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney’s Office of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Raymond Levites  
Former Assisted U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York; Former Assistant D.A., New York County

Lori Lightfoot  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Matthias A. Lydon  
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Kwame Manley  
Former Deputy Criminal Chief, United States Attorney’s Office, District of Maryland;
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Gerard P. Martin
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland; Former Trial Attorney, United States Department of Justice, Criminal Division

John Martin
Former United States District Judge, Southern District of New York; Former United States Attorney, Southern District of New York

John G. Martin
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District of New York; Former Assistant District Attorney, New York County

Steve J. Martin
Expert, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties; Former Expert, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division; Former Corrections Official, Texas Department of Corrections

Caleb Mason
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of California

Robert Mathias
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

A. Melvin McDonald
Former United States Attorney, District of Arizona

James E. McPherson
Former Judge Advocate General, Navy; Former Deputy Judge Advocate General, Navy; Active Duty, United States Navy, Judge Advocate General’s Corps

Thomas K. McQueen
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Kenneth J. Mighell
Former United States Attorney, Northern District of Texas; Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Texas

Sam Millsap
Former District Attorney, Bexar County, San Antonio, Texas

Steven Molo
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Nan R. Nolan
Former United States Magistrate Judge, Northern District of Illinois
Kirk Bowden Obear
Former Special Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of Illinois; Former Chief, Military Justice, Scott Air Force Base, United States Air Force

Stephen M. Orlofsky
Former Judge, United States District Court, District of New Jersey

Mark Osler
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District of Michigan

Kate Pflaumer
Former United States Attorney, West District of Washington

Richard J. Pocker
Former United States Attorney, District of Nevada; Assistant United States Attorney, District of Nevada; Captain, United States Army Judge Advocate General's Corps

Sidney Powell
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Western District of Texas, Northern District of Texas and Eastern District of Virginia

Ernest D. Preate, Jr.
Former Attorney General of Pennsylvania; Former District Attorney, Lackawanna County, PA

Daniel E. Reidy
Former First Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Dom J. Rizzi
Former Judge, Appellate Court of Illinois, First District; Former Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County

Benito Romano, Esq.
Former United States Attorney, Southern District of New York; Former Assistant United States Attorney

Richard A. Rossman
Former United States Attorney, Eastern District of Michigan

Mark L. Rotert
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Kenneth Roth
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of New York; Former Chief Appellate Attorney, Criminal Division, United States Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York

Stephen H. Sachs
Former United States Attorney, District of Maryland; Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland
Stephen Saltzburg
Former Ex-Officio Member, United States Sentencing Commission; Former Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, United States Department of Justice; Former Associate Counsel, Office of Independent Counsel for Iran/Contra

Donald E. Santarelli
Former Administrator, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, Department of Justice; Former Associate Deputy Attorney General, United States Department of Justice

William S. Sessions
Former Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Former Judge, United States District Court, Western District of Texas, Chief Judge; Former United States Attorney, Western District of Texas

Alan Silber
Former Assistant Prosecutor, Essex County, NJ, Chief Economic Crimes Unit

Earl J. Silbert
U.S. Attorney, District of Columbia; Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Columbia

Jeffrey B. Sklaroff
Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of New York

Charles B. Sklarsky
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois; Former Assistant State’s Attorney, Cook County, Illinois

Neal R. Sonnett
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Chief of Criminal Division, Southern District of Florida

Juliet S. Sorensen
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Herbert J. Stern
Former United States District Judge; Former United States Attorney, District of New Jersey

David J. Stetler
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Thomas P. Sullivan
Former United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Ann C. Tighe
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Keith Uhl
Former United States Special Prosecutor, District of Iowa

Atlee W. Wampler, III
Former United States Attorney, Southern District of Florida; Former Attorney-in-Charge, Miami Strike Force, Organized Crime and Racketeering Section, Department of Justice

M. David Weisman
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of Illinois

Kira Anne West
Former Assistant United States Attorney, Southern District of Texas

Andrew C. White
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Maryland

Warren D. Wolfson
Former Judge, Illinois Appellate Court, 1st District; Former Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County

David M. Zlotnick
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Columbia