

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Executive Business Meeting
October 22, 2015**

I commend all of those involved in crafting the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act. It is a true compromise. A guiding principle in our effort is a shared commitment to reducing the unsustainable size of our Federal prison population and the unfairness that exists in our sentencing laws—without sacrificing public safety.

Many of the laws we seek to modify were crafted here in this room. They were well intentioned, but many have had unintended consequences. There are too many in our society spending far too long in prison. Today we can begin to fix our mistakes.

I would like to see an end to all mandatory minimums, but the reforms in this bill represent real progress that I can support. A critical component is the opportunity for judges to apply our reforms retroactively on a case-by-case basis. Our concerns with proportionality and racial disparity require that these reforms apply to old sentences as well as to new ones.

The voices calling for reform continue to grow. Deputy Attorney General Yates reiterated her support this week for the reforms in our bill, as did former Attorney General Mukasey. Debi Campbell, whose children grew up in foster care because she received a 19 year sentence for selling meth reminded us of the real life impact of mandatory minimums. And yesterday 130 police chiefs, prosecutors, and sheriffs from all over the country joined together to support reform. These law enforcement leaders declared that “we need less incarceration, not more, to keep all Americans safe.” I would like to enter into the record their report as well as support letters from many organizations including the Major City Chiefs Association, the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

This Committee has worked for years to reform our criminal justice system. I convened hearings and moved bipartisan legislation when I served as chairman, and I commend Chairman Grassley for his leadership on these efforts. If we continue to work together, I believe that we will enact meaningful legislation that proves America is a nation of fairness and second chances.

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