

ASSOCIATION OF STATE CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

Executive Committee
President, John Wetzel
Vice President, Colette Peters
Treasurer, Anne Precythe
Past President, Leann Bertsch



Regional Representatives
Northeast, Scott Semple
Southern, Jefferson Dunn
Midwest, Heidi Washington
Western, Rick Raemisch

November 21, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
317 Russel Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA), we write to express support for the revised FIRST STEP Act (S. 3649, introduced by Senators Grassley and Durbin). We care deeply about improving justice outcomes and reducing recidivism, and are supportive of efforts to enact reforms to our criminal justice system.

ASCA members are the highest appointed Chief Executive Corrections Officials and Leaders for each U.S. State Corrections Agency, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Armed Services Corrections, any U.S. Territory, Possession and/or Commonwealth, the District of Columbia, and several large jail systems including New York City, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles County. All told, ASCA members represent over 400,000 corrections professionals and have command authority over 8 million inmates, parolees and felony probationers.

We endorsed the original version of the FIRST STEP Act because it sought to improve prison programming for inmates, by focusing on evidence-based programs that will lower recidivism rates for inmates. As corrections professionals, we support efforts to reduce the chances that

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people return to prison by providing them resources while they are incarcerated, like the FIRST STEP Act. We admire this endeavor because we believe that prison should help equip inmates with the tools they need to avoid returning to prison. Furthermore, we support the authors' efforts to provide inmates benefits for participating in such programs, such as phone and visiting privileges, and credit toward time in a halfway house, home detention or supervised release; these incentives will not only encourage participation, but will also help inmates maintain family bonds and potentially reduce the number of people in prison.

Significant and meaningful changes have been made to the FIRST STEP Act since it passed the House, including adding several provisions that would reform certain federal sentencing laws that have resulted in disproportionate sentences. ASCA feels that these changes are warranted and limited in such a way so as not to jeopardize public safety. The FIRST STEP Act also contains provisions that strengthen the justice system, such as codification of the Bureau of Prisons policy that pregnant and postpartum women not be shackled, de-escalation training for correctional officers, and expansion of the elderly and compassionate release programs. All of these changes, coupled with the recidivism reduction and risk assessment system that will be created and implemented, are laudable improvements to the federal justice system.

ASCA uniquely appreciates the importance of maintaining safety, particularly in a correctional setting. We also understand, however, that our justice system can be made better without compromising public safety. The revised FIRST STEP Act will do just that. For all of the above reasons, we urge you to support this legislation when it comes before you.

Sincerely,

John Wetzel
President