

**Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary**  
**“S.2123, Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015”**  
**Questions for the Record Submitted by Senator Al Franken**

**Question for Craig DeRoche:**

**Question 1.** The Judiciary Committee has heard and will continue to hear a great deal about the direct costs of mass incarceration, but I would like to focus on the collateral costs—specifically, its effect on children with a parent behind bars. Right now, more than 2.7 million children in this country have a parent in prison or jail. That’s one in 28 kids. But the numbers get bigger when you look at the number of children who have had a parent incarcerated at some point in their lives—that’s 10 million children. Kids who for some period of time have not had a mother or a father in their lives. And that has an impact beyond just heartbreak.

Studies have shown that kids with a father behind bars are significantly more likely to be expelled or suspended from school. And a family’s income during the years that a father is locked up is 22 percent lower than it was before he went away. After he’s released, it gets moderately better, but family income remains 15 percent lower than it was before he served time. These aren’t just temporary effects—education and family income are strong indicators of a child’s future economic mobility. So these are sobering statistics for anyone who believes that in our country, children should not be predestined to end up in the same position as their parents. Because right now, 10 million kids have the deck stacked against them.

Mr. DeRoche, through your work with prison fellowship ministries—speaking with and counseling offenders—what have you learned about the collateral effects of mass incarceration on families? And what impact do you think the reforms in the compromise bill will have on the children of prisoners?

**Answer:**

Incarceration takes a toll on prisoners themselves, but also has a ripple effect on families and communities. For example, when Ann Edenfield’s husband went to federal prison, she was left alone to raise four children on \$800 a month.<sup>1</sup> Not only did her family lose their primary breadwinner and experience a huge financial burden, but they also experienced social isolation, stigma by association, and immense stress.<sup>2</sup> In 15 year-old Michelle Rainey’s case, she was forced to drop out of school and become the caretaker of her younger siblings after her mother went to prison for a drug offense.<sup>3</sup> “The first couple of years, [my brothers and sister] did not

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Edenfield Sweet, *Crime's Hidden Victims*, 23 Inside Journal 1-2 (2014), <http://www.prisonfellowship.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/CrimesHiddenVictims.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Steve Rempe, *More Than Presents*, Prison Fellowship Blog (January 2015), <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2015/01/more-than-presents/>.

have Christmas presents,” Michelle shared. “It was all I could do to keep us fed. There wasn’t money for extra stuff.”<sup>4</sup>

Sadly, these are just a few real stories of the many touched by crime and incarceration. You referenced the staggering 2.7 million children—or 1 in 28—who have an incarcerated parent.<sup>5</sup> This number has increased from 1 in 125 children just 25 years ago.<sup>6</sup>

Children with an incarcerated parent often grow up in dire poverty, with feelings of loneliness and abandonment, as well as the social stigma of having a parent behind bars. Children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to deal with medical problems like obesity, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and substance abuse; and the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center found that they experience a “two fold increase” in mental illness risk, and are more likely to have major depression or attention disorders.<sup>7</sup> Children with an incarcerated parent may also be more likely to struggle in school. One study found that 26 percent of children with an incarcerated father are expelled or suspended from school, compared to just 4 percent of children without an incarcerated father.<sup>8</sup>

Even after prisoners return to their families and communities, many collateral effects of incarceration continue. Incarceration takes a serious toll on economic mobility and hence, the ability for formerly incarcerated men and women to provide for their families is impacted. Even after accounting for age, education, and residence, previous incarceration results in an 11 percent average reduction in wages and a 40 percent average reduction in yearly earnings.<sup>9</sup>

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act advances two laudable primary goals of restoring proportionate sentencing and building more rehabilitation program opportunities in prison, including work programs. More proportionate sentencing will allow fathers and mothers to be reunited with their children sooner. Rehabilitative programs will better prepare prisoners to return as contributing members of their families and communities. Returning earlier and more prepared, these formerly incarcerated men and women will be better able to meet the social, spiritual, and economic needs of their families.

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> The Economic Mobility Project, The Public Safety Performance Project of The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration’s Effect on Economic Mobility*, The Pew Charitable Trusts, 18 (2010) [hereinafter *Collateral Costs*], [http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs\\_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy G. La Vigne, Elizabeth Davies, & Diana Brazzell, *Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Children with Incarcerated Parents*, Urban Institute, 8 (February 2008), <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411616-Broken-Bonds-Understanding-and-Addressing-the-Needs-of-Children-with-Incarcerated-Parents.PDF>.

<sup>8</sup> *Collateral Costs* at 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 11.

Accordingly, this legislation will not only impact the lives of thousands of federal prisoners, it has the ability to strengthen the future of thousands of families and communities. I urge your colleagues to support its passage.