
TALKING POINTS: Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015

On October 1, 2015, a bipartisan group of senators introduced S. 2123, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, an important criminal justice reform package aimed at reducing some mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders and curbing recidivism. The bill was reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee overwhelmingly (15-5) on October 22 and has been waiting for a floor vote. This document provides some messages to use in pushing senators to support S. 2123 and in pushing the Senate leadership to bring the vote to the floor for a vote.

- **This is an opportunity for senators to show leadership.** This is one of the issues where both parties agree that reform is needed. With the nation focused on issues of policing and justice, passing a major piece of justice reform legislation could send an important signal to Americans that Congress really can work on solutions to some of our biggest problems.
- **Americans want reform. Polls continue to show that Americans want commonsense justice system reform** that makes the system more fair, protects public safety, and uses our resources efficiently.
 - A recent poll commissioned by the ACLU found that 69 percent of voters say it is important for the country to reduce its prison populations, including 81 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of Independents and 54 percent of Republicans.¹
 - Another recent poll commissioned by Families Against Mandatory Minimums found that 79 percent of Americans believe that the federal government is spending “too much money on locking up nonviolent offenders and should shift that funding to other pressing public safety priorities.”²
- **This bill is a bipartisan “smart on crime” approach senators should support.** A bipartisan group of senators came together to craft a thoughtful bill that ensures we are making smart, commonsense choices that make the system more fair, protect public safety, and use our resources efficiently. The bill recognizes what social science has proven for years: longer prison terms do not necessarily deter crime. We can be “smart on crime” by prioritizing our drug enforcement resource, rather than just locking so many people up in prison.
- **Public safety is one of our most important priorities as a nation** and people should be concerned about crime, but sentencing reform is still important. Smart, responsible bipartisan reforms like the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act will make the system work more fairly and efficiently and ensure that our communities are safe places for our friends and families.
 - Less than 14 percent of the people in federal prison for drug offenses were

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/other/aclu-nationwide-poll-criminal-justice-reform>

² <http://fammm.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FAMMM-National-Survey-Poll-Crosstabs.pdf>

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- sentenced for using violence, making a credible violent threat, or directing the use of violence by someone else during the offense.³
- o In fact, more than three quarters of the people in federal prison for drug offense have no serious history of violence before the offense for which they are imprisoned, with more than half having no violent history at all.⁴
 - **States have done this, it's time for the Congress to catch up.** States like Texas revamped their sentencing policies and other justice system policies and have not only reduced their prison populations, but have seen their crime rates continue to drop and are on track to save billions of dollars.

³³ <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000513-Who-Gets-Time-for-Federal-Drug-Offenses-Data-Trends-and-Opportunities-for-Reform.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.