

December 8, 2016

Honorable Patti B. Saris, Chair
United States Sentencing Commission
One Columbus Circle, N.E.
Suite 2-500, South Lobby
Washington, D.C. 20002-8002



Re: Chief Judge Patti B. Saris' Outstanding Service to the United States Sentencing Commission

Dear Chief Judge Saris:

In honor of your six years of service at the United States Sentencing Commission ("Commission"), the Justice Roundtable writes to thank and congratulate you for the Commission's accomplishments under your leadership.

During your tenure as chair, the Commission has promulgated policies that have resulted in a significantly reduced prison population. For example, in 2010, Bureau of Prison ("BOP") facilities were approximately 37 percent over capacity. Today, those facilities are less than 18 percent overcrowded due in large part to the Commission taking its mandate to address prison overcrowding seriously. In 2011, the Commission not only implemented the Fair Sentencing Act reductions for the statutory penalties of crack cocaine offenses but also made those guideline reductions retroactive. This decision resulted in more than 7,000 people receiving a reduction in their sentence.

In 2014, the Commission adopted what is commonly known as "Drugs -2" which reduced the guideline levels in the Drug Quantity Table by two levels. This was estimated to reduce sentences, by an average of 11 months, for people who committed drug crimes. Even more significant, the Commission made the bold decision to make the "Drugs -2" reductions retroactive. As a result, over 29,000 sentences have been reduced. In 2015, BOP reported that over 6,000 people were released on the first day of eligibility. But the impact of retroactivity on the BOP population will continue to be felt for years to come, as the Commission estimated that up to 46,000 people could ultimately be eligible for a retroactive reduction. Finally, the Commission clarified the definition of "extraordinary and compelling reasons" so that it is more consistent with the intent of the authorizing statute.

Judge Saris, your work with the Commission will have long lasting effects on the overall fairness of sentencing policy and the federal criminal justice system. We truly thank you for the leadership you have shown during your tenure as the Chair of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nkechi Taifa".

Nkechi Taifa
Co-Chair
Sentencing Reform Working Group
Justice Roundtable

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jesselyn McCurdy".

Jesselyn McCurdy
Co-Chair
Sentencing Reform Working Group
Justice Roundtable