



May 12, 2017

## **Justice Roundtable Coalition Condemns Attorney General Sessions New Charging Policy that will Escalate “The War on Drugs”**

The Justice Roundtable, a national coalition of legal, civil rights, criminal justice and faith-based organizations dedicated to advancing a fairer federal criminal justice system are deeply troubled by the new Department of Justice Charging and Sentencing Policy memo dated May 10<sup>th</sup>. This memo directs prosecutors “to charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense.” This type of draconian policy had previously contributed to mass incarceration at the federal level resulting in unprecedented incarceration for low-level drug offenses.

The following Justice Roundtable leaders offered the following reactions to the DOJ announcement.

***Statement by Jesselyn McCurdy, Deputy Director, American Civil Liberties Union Washington Legislative Office***

“The country has made great strides towards a more proportional and cost-effective criminal justice system at the federal level through Attorney General Holder 2013 Smart on Crime Initiative. The rescission of this DOJ guidance is from a playbook of the past when Pres. Nixon instituted the “War on Drugs” which is actually a “War on Black and Brown” people.”

***Statement by Nkechi Taiya, Director for Criminal Justice, Open Society Policy Center***

“There is broad bipartisan consensus across the country that harsh mandatory minimum sentences for low-level drug offenses are disproportionate, expensive and cruel. States across the country have taken steps to reform their drug laws by reducing sentences, diverting people to treatment instead of incarceration and reclassifying certain felony drug offenses to misdemeanors.”

***Statement by Kara Gotsch, Director of Strategic Initiatives, The Sentencing Project***

“According to the President’s budget blueprint, the Bureau of Prisons has achieved a substantial population reduction in its overcrowded prison system, providing the Department of Justice significant cost savings and flexibility in its funding choices. The population decrease was due to a number of factors, including the Smart on Crime initiative which helped to focus prosecutors on the most serious crimes and shift federal prosecutions away from low-level drug offenses to

allow state prosecutors take those cases, if they so choose. Reversing this directive would surely require a steep increase in spending, exacerbate overcrowding and jeopardize the safety of staff and prisoners.”

Please see the April 5, 2017 Letter the Justice Roundtable sent to Attorney General Sessions re: Smart on Crime Initiative

<https://justiceroundtable.org/resource/coalition-letter-urges-preservation-of-department-of-justice-smart-on-crime-guidance-related-policies/>