



NATIONAL CONFERENCE *of* STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas

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October 21, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
United States Capitol S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
United States Capitol S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: S. 2123 "Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015"

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

On behalf of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) we write in support of S. 2123 the bipartisan "Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015." (Corrections Act). This bill, while maintaining state discretion in criminal justice policies, reforms federal sentencing laws through reduced mandatory sentencing and enhanced anti-recidivism programs. These policies strengthen a fair, efficient and cost-effective criminal justice system that will ensure proportionate sentencing relative to the crime committed and save taxpayer money. States have been enacting sentencing and corrections laws that trend towards similar reforms. Federal reforms would complement those taking place at the state level.

In particular, the Corrections Act reduces sentences for certain offenses and expands current law to include violent offenders, provides recidivism reduction programming for low to moderate risk offenders, and ensures judges have the flexibility to consider individual mitigating circumstances. It also requires the Bureau of Prisons to assess recidivism risk and apply best practices for mitigating that risk including the use of community supervision or home confinement pre-release policies.

The Corrections Act also supports state and local law enforcement by applying a risk assessment-based approach to address recidivism programming and pre-release custody, thereby giving inmates a better chance at professional and personal success when they return home to their communities. Risk assessment policies have proven effective at the state level, with states such as New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arkansas and Ohio all requiring evaluation as a condition of prisoners pre-release¹. Kentucky requires risk and needs assessments as the offender moves through several stages of the criminal justice system including presentence investigation reports for courts to determine an offender's eligibility for incarceration alternatives. State courts are also empowered with greater flexibility and discretion to use risk assessments to order offenders into drug treatment programs instead of incarceration.

¹ [Sentencing and Corrections Policy Updates Newsletter](#), by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

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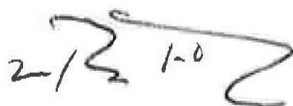
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State reports also show that sentencing reforms have achieved cost-savings and public safety gains. For instance, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Delaware have reduced penalties and granted courts sentencing discretion for certain drug offenses which is estimated to have collectively saved corrections nearly \$685 million by year 2022². Colorado overhauled their drug sentencing laws and reinvested savings to fund drug diversion programs³. If the Corrections Act is enacted, it would realize similar tax savings, which can be reinvested to further strengthen state systems.

As prisoners are released from federal prisons and return to their local communities, states support offenders reentering society. The Corrections Act brings federal criminal justices further in line with state reform trends and offer a more cohesive justice system.

NCSL is committed to working with you and your staff on this bill as it makes its way through the Senate. Please contact NCSL staff Susan Parnas Frederick (202) 624-5400 susan.frederick@ncsl.org or Danielle Dean (202) 624-5400, danielle.dean@ncsl.org with any questions or concerns. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Senator Briggs Hopson, Mississippi
Co-Chair, NCSL
Committee on Law, Criminal Justice
and Public Safety



Representative John Tilley, Kentucky
Co-Chair, NCSL
Committee on Law and Criminal Justice
and Public Safety

² [Trends in Sentencing and Corrections: State Legislation](#), by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

³ [Savings Analysis Report: First Two Years of Implementation](#) by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, Department of Public Safety

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