

Honorable Member of Congress,

Greetings from the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition. We hope that you will work with us during the 116th Congress to reform our broken criminal justice system to make it more just and humane.

The ICJC convenes a faith community that spans the partisan divide. Consisting of roughly 50 national, faith-based organizations in Washington, D.C. participants include the United Methodist Church, National Council of Churches, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and many others. We are a working group of the Washington Interreligious Staff Community and a coalition partner with the Justice Roundtable. We find commonality in the values of restorative justice and the transformative properties of the divine- where the victims find healing, the offenders find accountability and restoration, and the wider community remains whole. We work to transform our broken criminal justice system into one that restores both individuals and communities.

The ICJC seeks a faithful response to end mass incarceration, promote fairer sentencing, and support restorative reentry programs in our communities and the wider nation. Informed by our grassroots partners in the form of churches and other houses of worship and other faith-based organizations, our coalition approaches this work with a deep understanding of the intersectionality of poverty, racial bias, and mental and physical health disparities. It is important to understand how these elements factor into the ills of mass incarceration. We also understand the need for a holistic approach to reforming the system.

The ICJC formed in 2007 to support the passage of the Second Chance Act, which provides reentry programs for returning citizens in the areas of housing, employment, and substance abuse and mental health treatment. We also worked together with bipartisan coalitions to advocate for the passage of the Fair Sentencing Act, which significantly reduced the sentencing disparities for convictions related to crack versus powder cocaine violations. Further, we advocated for the important sentencing reform provisions, some of which were ultimately included in the First Step Act of 2018, including the retroactive application of the Fair Sentencing Act, and reduced mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses, among other important provisions. The First Step Act also included reauthorization of the Second Chance Act providing grants for important reentry services for the formerly incarcerated. At the same time our coalition opposed sections of the bill. We opposed elements such as the risk assessments and electronic monitoring because the static factors could perpetuate mass incarceration through disparate treatment and bill language providing for an expansion of monitoring through supervised release.

Today, we are concerned about its implementation, especially ensuring adequate funding for the programs it established or renewed. There are many remaining needs in the criminal justice reform area, including issues involving smarter sentencing policies, prison reforms, juvenile justice, improvements to reentry programs, and elimination of the countless collateral consequences that prevent our community members from returning home successfully. We also remain committed to enactment of the sentencing reforms that were not included in the First Step Act, specifically including the ability of currently incarcerated people to seek to have their sentences reduced in accordance with the sentencing changes that were made on a prospective only basis.

As the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition, we are eager to serve as a resource for you. Our ready-bench of grass-tops faith leaders, passionate advocates, and on-the-ground service providers are well-equipped to support your legislative efforts to reform our criminal justice system. Please reach out to the staff listed below with questions or ideas for collaboration. We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

The Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition

African American Ministers In Action

American Friends Service Committee

Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Bread for The World

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Exodus Foundation.org

Faith Action Network - WA state

Jesuit Conference—Office of Justice and Ecology

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

National Alliance of Faith and Justice

National Council of Churches

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries