



**INTERFAITH
CRIMINAL
JUSTICE
COALITION**

July 08, 2019

First Step Act FY20 Appropriations

The Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition (ICJC) is a national participatory coalition of diverse faith communities ministering in neighborhoods deeply impacted by a broken criminal justice system. ICJC's focus is advocating for a transformed justice paradigm and system that respects divine human dignity, prevents harm, promotes restoration with accountability, and seeks wholeness for all communities. We bring together a large and diverse group of faith organizations committed to addressing mass incarceration in the United States.

The undersigned, being participants in the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition (ICJC) write today in support of fully funding the FIRST STEP Act. The FIRST STEP Act authorized \$75 million annually from fiscal year (FY) 2019 through FY2023. We were disheartened that Congress, so soon after passing the FIRST STEP Act, failed to provide any appropriations for enacting the bill in FY19 spending. While funds were appropriated for the reauthorized Second Chance Act which provides grant funding for drug treatment, vocational training, and other federal re-entry programs outside of prisons, without providing adequate appropriations for the important programs of the FIRST Step Act those efforts will be stymied. Significant problems persist in prisons and programming in prisons is essential to reducing recidivism through rehabilitation, increasing personal dignity, and unlocking individual potential. The FIRST STEP Act has the potential to help thousands of people in communities across the country, but only if it receives the full amount of funding authorized. Pre and post recidivism programs must be enacted and funded in tandem in order to have the greatest impact.

Programs from the Act such as educational and occupational training in prisons provide dignity through opportunity. There are literacy courses, general and advanced occupational education classes, release preparation courses, and a wide range of other programs. The need exists for greater access to these opportunities. For example, in FY2018, there were 15,674 inmates enrolled in high school equivalency programs. The demand for literacy programs has increased, leading to a wait list of approximately 16,000 incarcerated people. Long waiting lists keep incarcerated people from reaching pivotal achievements like a GED. Being unable to take advantage of literacy programs due to a lack of availability stunts people from improving and keeps them from career prospects upon release.

Another crucial recidivism reduction measure is access to substance abuse treatment. Under the Act, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), subject to the availability of appropriations, must provide appropriate residential substance abuse treatment for 100 percent of incarcerated people who have a substance abuse diagnosis or chemical dependence. The Residential Drug Abuse Treatment (RDAP) provides such services. Often crimes occur because of poverty or addiction. Treatment is key to rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Integrating incarcerated people prior to their release date into the community through access to Residential Reentry Centers (RRCs or halfway houses) promotes adjustment to life in the community. These centers support successful re-entry by providing a structured environment while also facilitating job placement.

Finally, the evidence has shown that a job is one of the best anti-recidivism programs. The Act requires more robust job training and education at the Bureau of Prison, which are the keys to success for incarcerated men and women.

All these programs work in concert with one another, their success is contingent on the support and funding they receive. From literacy programs, to drug treatment to job training, these are the building blocks to help ensure incarcerated individuals are equipped with the tools needed to succeed upon release. As people of faith who believe strongly in redemption and transformation, we believe it is critical that these programs be given every chance for success. We believe in the transformative powers of God to redeem and incarcerated people deserve support to create the circumstances for rehabilitation to take place. It is not enough to identify the need, and it is not enough to authorize programs, Congress must take the additional step of fully funding these programs at the levels authorized by the FIRST STEP Act.

Sincerely,

Bread for the World

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice

The Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Jesuit Conference - Office of Justice and Ecology

National Council of Churches of Christ

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Sojourners

United Church of Christ

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society