



International Association of
Chiefs of Police

44 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314-2357
Phone: 703-836-6767; 1-800-THE IACP
Fax: 703-836-4543
Web: www.theiacp.org

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May 11, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Democratic Leader Reid,

On behalf of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the world's largest organization of law enforcement executives, we write in support of the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, S. 2123. We applaud the efforts of the sponsors of S. 2123 for working with the law enforcement community and other stakeholders throughout the process. We believe the revised legislation achieves a proper balance of preserving and expanding mandatory minimums for violent offenders and career criminals, while reducing recidivism, and addressing the burgeoning prison population through thoughtful and careful measures. In addition, the bill does not just stop at sentencing reform and corrections, but also takes a significant step to examine the entire criminal justice system, through the addition of the National Criminal Justice Commission Act.

For more than two decades, the IACP has advocated for the creation of a commission that would allow for a comprehensive examination and report on the state of law enforcement and criminal justice in the United States, and we are extremely appreciative that this bill includes that provision. The proposed National Criminal Justice Commission would follow in the footsteps of the 1965 Presidential Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. The work of that commission and the 200 recommendations it produced marked the beginning of a sea change in our methods for dealing with crime and built the framework for many highly effective law enforcement and public safety initiatives that have been in place for the last forty years.

The commission that will be established by this bill embraces the same mission as the 1965 Commission. In conducting a critical review of the criminal justice system, the commission will have the opportunity to examine and develop recommendations addressing the broad range of new and emerging challenges that confront law enforcement and the criminal justice community, from cybercrime to non-traditional organized crime, from violent street gangs to homeland security. This is absolutely essential so we can develop a strategic plan that will guide an integrated public safety and homeland security effort in the years ahead.

The safety of our communities is the paramount priority for law enforcement, and that includes keeping violent offenders off the streets and working with prior offenders on rehabilitation efforts so that when they are released they return as productive and upstanding citizens. To that end, we believe that this legislation strikes a proper balance between ensuring that those convicted of violent felonies off the streets while modifying the current three strikes rule. Under the proposed legislation, the three strikes rule for drug felonies is modified with a third strike now carrying a 25-year penalty as opposed to life, and second strike carrying a 15-year sentence instead of 20 years. Most importantly, the revised legislation now excludes offenders convicted of any serious violent felony from retroactive early release, ensuring that truly violent offenders cannot benefit from any reduced sentence opportunity established by the bill, while still allowing low-level offenders a possible chance for rehabilitation.

In addition, the IACP is also pleased that the revised bill also establishes a mandatory sentencing enhancement for offenses involving fentanyl, a dangerous opioid and a growing problem in our communities that has led to thousands of drug overdoses and deaths.

Of course, as offenders return to their communities, adequate support must be provided in order to break the cycle of recidivism. This legislation takes that into account through programs to reduce recidivism including job training, educational opportunities, and mentoring services. In addition, this legislation develops a risk assessment tool that will categorize inmates based on their risk of recidivism and make a determination on the kind and amount of recidivism reduction programming or productive activities appropriate for each prisoner's needs and risks.

Finally, S. 2123 also includes an important provision that requires an annual report by the Attorney General outlining how the reduced expenditures and cost savings resulting from modifications to federal sentencing will be reinvested into efforts that will benefit law enforcement, such as investment in law enforcement and crime prevention to combat gangs of national significance and high-level drug traffickers; to hire, train, and equip law enforcement officers and prosecutors; and to promote programs using evidence-based practices and strategic planning to help reduce crime and criminal recidivism.

On behalf of our more than 26,000 members, we applaud the senators and their staff who worked hard on this legislation. Again, we thank you for working with the law enforcement community throughout this process, and we look forward to continuing to work together to move this bipartisan legislation forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Cunningham".

Terrence Cunningham
President

International Association of Chiefs of Police