



April 14, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
Russell Senate Office Building, Room: 317
1st and C Streets, N.E.
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015

Dear Senator McConnell,

On behalf of *AAPIs Beyond Bars*, a coalition of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) organizations, community leaders, and directly impacted individuals, as well as the 39 undersigned organizations, we urge you to support the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 2123). The criminal justice system in America drastically needs comprehensive reform. In the past 30 years America's prison population has increased by over 500 percent, resulting in the incarceration of nearly 1 in 100 American adults. As a result of mandatory minimum sentences and "tough on crime" policies, the costly prison system disproportionately incarcerates communities of color at much higher rates, leaving millions of individuals and their families devastated by incarceration.

In particular, the AAPI population is often overlooked in the criminal justice system. Throughout much of the prison system, AAPIs are categorized as "others" upon entering the system. During the prison boom of the 1990s, the AAPI prisoner population grew by 250%.¹ In 2013, there were 118,100 "Others" in the state and federal prison system, accounting for 9% of the state and federal prison system.² The number of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders also grew 22% between 2002 and 2010, a rate significantly higher than the 8% growth of the total incarcerated population in the U.S.³

The rise of AAPI mass incarceration is tied to the growth of immigration detention and deportation, particularly in the Southeast Asian Community. In the past 20 years, at least 15,000 Southeast Asian Americans from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam have received final orders of deportation, despite many arriving to the United States with refugee status and obtaining green cards.⁴ Further, the lack of culturally competent reentry support for these communities destines them to high rates of recidivism and poor outcomes post-incarceration.

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act would reform mandatory minimum sentencing, expand pre-release and reentry programs, reduce the length of certain non-violent drug offenses, and encourage evaluations and reporting to inform best practices surrounding detention and re-entry. We urge you to

¹ Oh, A., and Umemoto, K. AAPIs: From incarceration to re-entry. *Amerasian Journal*. 2005;31(3):43-59.

² Carson, E.A. *Prisoners in 2013*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014. Available at: <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p13.pdf>, Accessed 16 November 2015.

³ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Statistics, *National Prisoner Statistics 2002-2010*.

⁴ *AAPIs Behind Bars: Exposing the School to Prison to Deportation Pipeline*:
http://www.searac.org/sites/default/files/18877%20AAPIs%20Behind%20Bars_web.pdf

bring S. 2123 on the floor for a vote as it is a critical first step to comprehensive criminal justice reform that is sorely needed in our country.

Signed,

APIs Beyond Bars:

ILove Movement, Philadelphia, PA
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), AFL-CIO, Washington, DC
Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC), Oakland, CA
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC), Los Angeles, CA
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), Washington, DC

Other Supporting Organizations:

California:

APALA San Diego
API RISE Asian Pacific Islander Re-Entry & Inclusion through Support and Empowerment, Los Angeles
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, Oakland
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance - Los Angeles
Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO), Oakland
Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, Los Angeles
Banteay Srei, Oakland
Community Youth Center of San Francisco, San Francisco
ASPIRE-LA, Los Angeles
Center for Asian American Media, San Francisco
Healthy House Within a MATCH Coalition, Merced
NAPAFASA, Los Angeles
Project 4R, Los Angeles
Restoring Justice for Indigenous Peoples, Burney
Root & Rebound, Oakland
Sigma Beta Xi, Inc., Moreno Valley
The Center for APA Women, San Francisco
VietUnity, Oakland

District of Columbia:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Asian American Psychological Association
Laotian American National Alliance
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates

Connecticut:

Reappropriate, New Haven

Colorado:

National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association, Denver

Hawaii:

Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, Kapolei

Maryland:

Asian American & Pacific Islander Student Involvement & Advocacy, College Park
Carpenters Union, Upper Marlboro

Nevada:

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance-Nevada

New York:

DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving, Queens
Mekong NYC, Bronx, NY
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, Brooklyn

North Carolina:

Southeast Coalition, Charlotte

Virginia:

Boat People SOS (BPSOS), Falls Church
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium, Annandale

Washington:

Formerly Incarcerated Group Healing Together, Seattle, WA