

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Rob Portman  
United States Senate  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Portman,

We write to express our support for your resolution declaring April 2017 as Second Chance Month and to urge your colleagues to join the resolution as cosponsors. Our diverse organizations have come together to celebrate April as Second Chance Month and to raise awareness about the obstacles faced by the estimated 65 million Americans who have a criminal record.<sup>1</sup>

The estimated number of legal collateral consequences of a criminal conviction exceeds 48,000.<sup>2</sup> Many of these consequences are mandatory, taking effect automatically, regardless of a nexus to public safety, the seriousness of the offense, the time passed since the offense, or the individual's efforts to make amends or earn back the public's trust. These consequences, which disproportionately impact communities of color, include an inability to regain voting rights, volunteer in the community, and secure housing, admission to institutions of higher education, and employment. These barriers can contribute to recidivism, which increases victimization, decreases public safety, and results in lost economic output for the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Gaining meaningful employment is one of the most significant predictors of successful reentry and preventing future criminal activity.<sup>4</sup> However, ninety percent of those who have previously been incarcerated struggle to find employment because of both societal and legal barriers which are often not directly related to the offense committed or any proven public safety benefit.<sup>5</sup> Education has also been shown to be a significant predictor of successful reentry.<sup>6</sup> People with a criminal record have lower levels of educational attainment than the general population and have significant difficulty acquiring admission to and funding for educational programs.<sup>7</sup> The impact of the inability to pursue higher education, find gainful employment and other collateral

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Natividad Rodriguez & Maurice Emsellem, *65 Million "Need Not Apply": The Case for Reforming Criminal Background Checks for Employment*, The National Employment Law Project (March 2011), [http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/65\\_Million\\_Need\\_Not\\_Apply.pdf](http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/65_Million_Need_Not_Apply.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Justice Center, *National Inventory of the Collateral Consequences of Conviction*, The Council of State Governments (2016), <https://niccc.csjusticecenter.org/map/>.

<sup>3</sup> John Schmitt & Kris Warner, *Ex-offenders and the Labor Market*, Center for Economic and Policy Research (November 2010), <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/ex-offenders-2010-11.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> John M. Nally, et al., *Post-Release Recidivism and Employment among Different Types of Released Offenders: A 5-Year Follow-up Study in the United States*, 9 Int'l J. of Crim. Just. Sci. 1, 16, 23 (2014); Le'Ann Duran, et al., *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness*, The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2013), [https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Final.Reentry-and-Employment.pp\\_.pdf](https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Final.Reentry-and-Employment.pp_.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Makarios, et al., *Examining the Predictors of Recidivism Among Men and Women Released from Prison in Ohio*, 37 Crim. Just. Behav. 1377 (December 2010).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

consequences of conviction inhibit the economic mobility of people with criminal history, negatively impacting the well-being of their children and families for generations.<sup>8</sup>

As you know, the anniversary of the Second Chance Act of 2007, which has provided reentry services to over 137,000 people in 49 states and the District of Columbia since its passage, falls on April 9.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the anniversary of the death of Charles Colson, who used his second chance following his incarceration for a Watergate-related crime to found Prison Fellowship, the nation's largest outreach to prisoners and their families, falls on April 21, 2012. Designating April as Second Chance Month can contribute to increased public awareness about the need for closure for those who have paid their debt. We look forward to continuing to highlight opportunities for individuals, employers, congregations, and communities to extend second chances this April. We thank you for your leadership to advance successful reentry and second chances and urge your colleagues to join the resolution.

Sincerely,

American Correctional Association  
Bread for the World  
Center for Community Alternatives  
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office  
Coalition for Juvenile Justice  
Council of State Governments Justice Center  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Faith & Freedom Coalition  
Families Against Mandatory Minimums  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Kansas Appleseed  
Law Enforcement Action Partnership  
Lifted From The Rut  
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency  
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers  
National Association of Evangelicals  
National Criminal Justice Association  
National Employment Law Project  
National Legal Aid & Defender Association  
Pretrial Justice Institute  
Prison Fellowship  
Project New Opportunity  
R Street Institute  
Right on Crime  
TASC Illinois  
Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission  
The Sentencing Project

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<sup>8</sup> Becky Pettit & Bruce Western, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*, The Pew Charitable Trusts (2010), [http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs\\_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Justice Center, *The Second Chance Act*, The Council of State Governments (January 2016), [https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SCA\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SCA_Fact_Sheet.pdf).