

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2009

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

Please support the President's request of \$75 million for Second Chance Act programs in FY 2010.

In 2007, Federal and state prisons held just under 1.6 million inmates – one in every 198 U.S. residents – and released 725,000 individuals back to our communities. Unfortunately, most individuals face numerous challenges when returning to the community from prison, and research indicates that more than half return to prison within three years of their release. The Second Chance Act addresses this problem with a common sense, evidence-based approach to improving public safety.

These grants will provide crucial resources at a time when they are desperately needed.

- More than 10,000 individuals are released from Maryland state prisons every year, and more than 5,000 are released from Maryland jails. The average reading level of Maryland inmates is between the sixth and eighth grade level; less than half hold high school degrees or GEDs; and most did not have jobs when they were arrested.
- The Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) releases more than 10,000 prisoners every year. Substance abuse is a key factor in approximately 70 percent of the cases of offenders entering the ADOC. Sixty percent lack a high school diploma. Twenty-eight percent of inmates released in 2003 returned to the custody of the ADOC within three years.
- In Vermont, half of the inmates released from prison in 2003 were reconvicted within three years. The mental health treatment needs of the population are high -- 35 percent of male inmates and 56 percent of female inmates have diagnosed mental illnesses. And 77 percent of individuals sentenced to prison in Vermont for property and drug offenses have substance use disorders, but only 13 percent of those receive treatment while incarcerated.

Though individuals face many challenges when they return from prison or jail to the community, research confirms that comprehensive, coordinated services can help formerly incarcerated individuals find stable employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism.

- In Illinois, the Safer Foundation's Transitional Employment Program provides career planning training, job coaches, job search training and activities, and replacement and retention services. Compared to all individuals released from Illinois prisons, recidivism is 61 percent lower among clients who complete the program.
- In New York, La Bodega de la Familia provided a range of services to individuals with substance use disorders involved with the criminal justice or family court systems and their families, including walk-in services, 24-hour crisis intervention, and family case management. A 2002 evaluation found that Bodega participants were significantly less likely to use any illegal drug than the comparison group, and were less likely to be arrested and convicted within six months of release.

- In Maryland, a coalition of service providers came together in 1999 to form the Maryland Reentry Partnership Initiative (REP), which coordinates efforts to provide prisoners returning to select Baltimore neighborhoods with comprehensive reentry services. A 2007 evaluation found that REP clients committed fewer crimes during the study period than ex-prisoners in the comparison group.
- The Kansas Shawnee County Reentry Program (SCRCP) serves high risk individuals starting 12 months prior to release. Participants are assessed for needs and assigned a reentry case manager who develops a case plan and coordinates service. During the 12 month period prior to release, the offender works on his/her plan, attending classes, doing cognitive work, and preparing for housing and treatment after release. Prior to release, individuals are connected to services in the community, including treatment (mental health and substance abuse), medical care, family services, housing and job preparedness and work with the reentry case manager. A 2007 study found Shawnee Reentry Program participants had lower recidivism rates than three comparison groups.

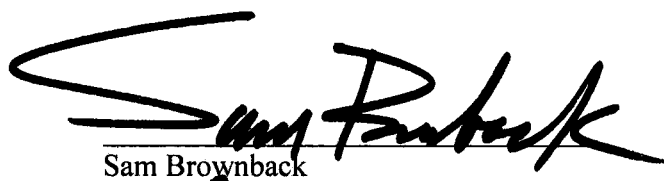
The Second Chance Act, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law in April 2008, authorizes \$165 million for programs that will improve coordination of reentry services and policies at the state and local levels. The Second Chance Act includes a \$55 million program for Adult and Juvenile Offender State and Local Reentry Demonstration Projects, which improve coordination of reentry initiatives and implement evidence-based practices. The Second Chance Act also authorizes a \$15 million program for Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Organizations, which provide mentoring and other transitional services to adult and juvenile offenders reentering the community.

State and local governments and nonprofit organizations around the country are eager to launch innovative reentry programs, and families and communities are desperate to access the services the Second Chance Act will provide. Please support fiscal year 2010 funding for the Second Chance Act.

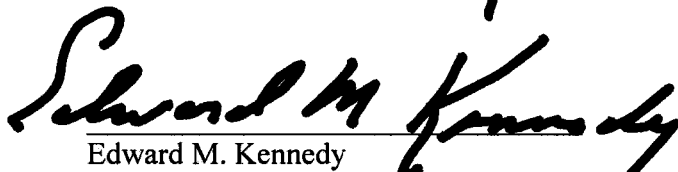
Sincerely,



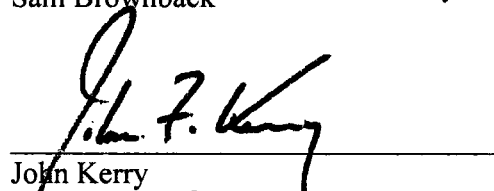
Patrick Leahy



Sam Brownback



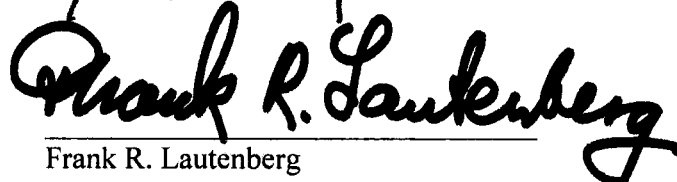
Edward M. Kennedy



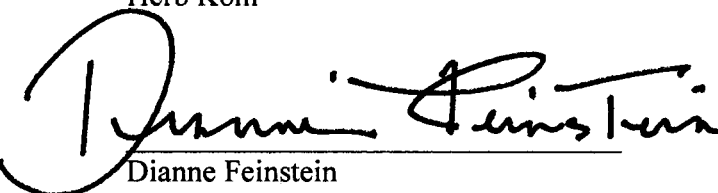
John Kerry



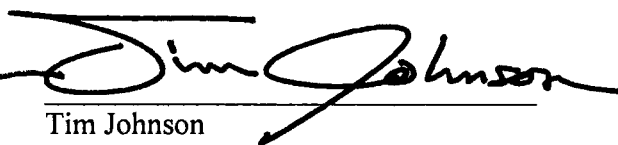
Herb Kohl



Frank R. Lautenberg



Dianne Feinstein



Tim Johnson


Kirsten E. Gillibrand


Benjamin L. Cardin


Arlen Specter

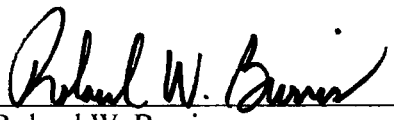

Jack Reed

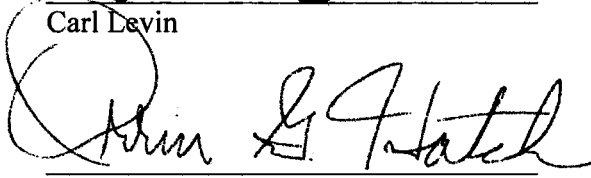

Bernard Sanders


Robert P. Casey, Jr.

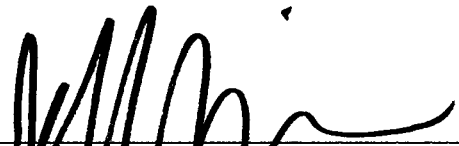

Christopher J. Dodd


Carl Levin


Roland W. Burris


Orrin G. Hatch



Daniel K. Akaka

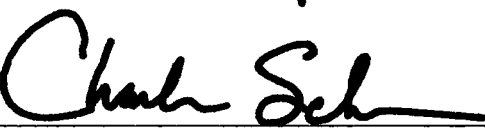

Jeff Bingaman

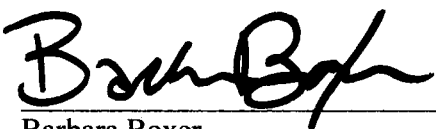

Sheldon Whitehouse


Sherrod Brown


Edward E. Kaufman

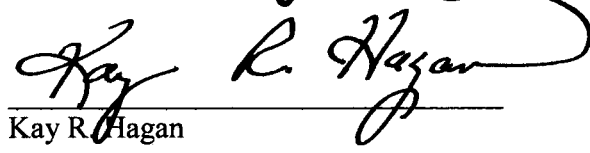

Claire McCaskill


Charles E. Schumer

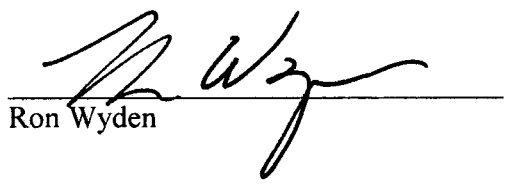

Barbara Boxer



Robert Menendez



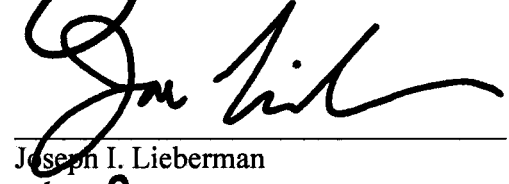
Kay R. Hagan



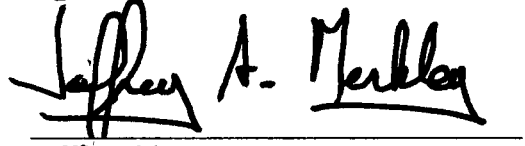
Ron Wyden



Jim Webb



Joseph I. Lieberman



Jeff Merkley

cc: The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye, Chairman,
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations