

July 26, 2021

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
711 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chair
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee
2142 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, Chairman Nadler, and Ranking Member Jordan:

On behalf of the Campaign to Keep Families Together and Our Communities Safe, the undersigned organizations urge you to support the FAMILIES Act, the first federal legislation seeking to create a Parental Diversion Program with collaboration between the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services which is being introduced in the House and Senate on July 21st. The bill will provide programs for education, employment services, parenting skills, mental health and substance abuse services while creating a State grant program and contributing to the research base on these programs.

It is currently time to end unnecessary family separations by the criminal justice system. The United States incarcerates the parents of 2.7 million children at this very moment. Over 10 million children and adult children have experienced parental incarceration in their lifetime.

- Black children are seven times and Latino/a children are two times more likely to have a parent in prison than white youth. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the data for Native children of incarcerated parents is not known nationally, but in Oklahoma, data shows Native children are twice as likely as white children to have incarcerated parents; while in both Dakotas, they are about five times more likely.
- Incarceration of parents creates substantial drops in income for families, increases anxiety, mental health difficulties, and reduces educational achievement for children.
- Incarcerating parents decreases life expectancy by 2.6 years for children according to the Prison Policy Initiative.

Fortunately, we already know how to solve this problem. California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Oregon, and Washington have created successful programs that divert parents from receiving sentences. These programs provide eligible parents with community custody including extensive programming and treatment by providing stability to children, ensure family success, reduce crime, and increase community vibrancy. Washington State's program has a 71% successful completion rate. Only 8% of participants who successfully complete the program return to prison compared to 30% for the overall incarcerated individual population.

There is also momentum at the federal and state levels to support family alternatives to sentencing. For example, President Biden’s Plan for Strengthening America’s Commitment to Justice includes language to review programs for non-violent incarcerated individuals to serve sentences at home. It acknowledges the impact of incarceration on families and states, “We can and must reduce the number of people incarcerated in this country while also reducing crime,” and they intend to, “Expand other effective alternatives to detention.” Likewise many conservative criminal justice focused organizations support family preservation. Additionally, bipartisan-supported language funding for a grant program to replicate family-based alternative sentencing pilot programs passed Congress in FY’21 and we are hopeful funding will be increased this year. The program received bipartisan support and support from both progressive and conservative criminal justice organizations.

To that end, we urge you to support the FAMILIES Act and create a new program that helps ensure families receive the support that they need to stay together and help ensure that the community is safer as a result.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

KidsMates Inc.
Justice Strategies
Center for Popular
Democracy Action
Strategies for Youth
Phoenix Transition
Program
DanceSafe
National Association of
Counsel for Children
Broken No More
Fair and Just
Prosecution
William C. Velasquez
Institute
POPS the Club
CAN-DO Foundation
Law Enforcement
Action Partnership
National Health Care for
the Homeless Council

National Working
Positive Coalition

Treatment Action Group

WE GOT US NOW

National Center on
Adoption and
Permanency

MPact: Global Action for
Gay Health & Rights

National Crittenton

What's Next
Washington

A New PATH (Parents
for Addiction Treatment
& Healing)

International
Association of Providers
of AIDS Care

International
Association of Providers
of AIDS Care

Fast-Track Cities
Institute

National CURE

Global Liver Institute

Woodhull Freedom
Foundation

National Association of
Criminal Defense
Lawyers

StoptheDrugWar.org

Church of Scientology
National Affairs Office

Washington Office on
Latin America

Health Not Prisons
Collective

Women on the Rise

The Levenson
Foundation

LINQ For Life
Incorporated

AIDS United

Positive Women's
Network-USA

PFLAG National

National Council of
Churches USA

Tzedek Association

Bayard Rustin
Liberation Initiative

Health in Justice Action
Lab

life for pot

Center for Disability
Rights

RestoreHER
US.America

Sero Project

Students for Sensible
Drug Policy

Community Liver
Alliance

The Well Project

The 6:52 Project
Foundation, Inc.

PFLAG National

UltraViolet

Coalition on Human
Needs

The Fortune Society

Center for LGBTQ
Economic Advancement
& Research (CLEAR)

APLA Health

Drug Policy Alliance

State Organizations:

The Porchlight
Collective SAP

Dynamic Faith
Ministries

Next100

Women on the Rise

Black Futurists Group

Texas Criminal Justice
Coalition

Texas Women's Justice
Coalition

AIDS Alabama

Justice 4 Housing

Transcend Charlotte

AIDS Foundation
Chicago

Hawaii Health & Harm
Reduction Center

Residential Youth
Services &
Empowerment (RYSE)

Hawai'i Friends of
Restorative Justice

Hep Free Hawaii

Women's Fund of
Hawaii

Community Alliance on
Prisons

GoodWorks: North
Alabama Harm
Reduction

CARES of Southwest
Michigan

Citizens for Prison
Reform

Hour Children

Center for Living and
Learning

Vivent Health
Operation Restoration
Center for Community
Alternatives
Interfaith Movement for
Human Integrity
North Carolina AIDS
Action Network
San Francisco AIDS
Foundation
VOCAL-WA
Washington Defender
Association
Washington Association
of Criminal Defense
Lawyers
Rural AIDS Action
Network
The Cornerstone
Residence
TPAN
Smoky Mountain Harm
Reduction
Second Chance Center
Saouthern AIDS
Coalition
Friends of Guest House
Live4Lali
Hondureños contra el
SIDA
HIV Modernization
Movement-Indiana
Greater Hudson
Promise Neighborhood
Inc
Clary Strategies
New York Initiative for
Children of Incarcerated
Parents

Osborne Association

Maryland Justice
Project

Partners for Our
Children

Exchange Union

Chicago Urban league

Florida Harm Reduction
Collective Inc

Rural Women's Health
Project

ADVOCACY HOUSE
SERVICES. INC

Initially conceived in 2014, the CAMPAIGN to Keep Families Together and Our Communities Safe seeks to expand opportunities to keep families vibrant and ensure that eligible parents who are involved with the justice system are able to remain with their children while receiving appropriate services that benefit families and communities. The campaign today is guided by a Work Group of 12 people including former incarcerated parents, children of incarcerated parents and advocates. Please contact Isabel Coronado at coronado@thenext100.org for additional information.