DATE: January 27, 2016
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

URGE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION STRENGTHENING AND MOVING CRUCIAL SENTENCING REFORM THROUGH CONGRESS
NAACP IS ENCOURAGED BY BI-PARTISAN SUPPORT FOR CALL TO ENACT GENUINE SENTENCING REFORM

THE ISSUE:
The move to amend current criminal justice law – to change who we lock up, for which offenses, and for how long – is gaining momentum. Bi-partisan bills have been introduced in both the Senate (S. 2123, the “Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015) and the House of Representatives (H.R. 3713, the “Sentencing Reform Act of 2015”). Both bills have bi-partisan co-sponsors and support, and both bills have been approved of by the respective committees of jurisdiction and are awaiting floor action in the House and the Senate.

The current bicameral, bipartisan support for sentencing reform presents us with a unique opportunity to meaningfully reform a significant aspect of our broken criminal justice system. We need to seize this opportunity and enact aggressive reforms based on what has been proven effective, what we know has lead to the problems with which we are faced today, and what we know in our hearts and minds is fair, judicious, and transforming. Due largely to the recklessness of mandatory minimum sentences enacted decades ago, too many people are being sent to prison when other alternatives would be more appropriate and effective, and there is an unacceptable racial disparity among the men and women who are imprisoned. Over the last 30 years, there has been a 500% increase in incarceration; almost 60% of the people in prison or jail right now are racial or ethnic minorities, while we comprise just over 27% of the national population.

S. 2123 / H.R. 3713 marks a good start, yet more can, and should be done to reform the sentencing policies of our nation. This legislation must be seen as a beginning, not the full cure or the end of the ills which are pervasive in our system. We must work with Congress, the Administration, and other interested parties to include additional sentencing reforms, including:

- The increased use of evidence-based sentencing alternatives, including drug, Veteran, and mental health courts;
- Reducing recidivism through educational and job training opportunities for prisoners while they are incarcerated (this includes restoring Pell grant eligibility to prisoners);
- A concentration on using prison space for career or violent criminals;
- The elimination of all mandatory minimum sentences, and an increase in judicial discretion; and
- In depth reports to Congress by the U.S. Department of Justice on the extent to which reforms have addressed both over-incarceration and racial disparities.

We as a nation can, and must, do better. We owe it to our youth, our families, our communities, and our nation to enact meaningful sentencing reform.
THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:
Contact your Representative and both your Senators and URGE THEM TO SUPPORT THE STRENGTHENING AND PASSAGE OF SENTENCING REFORM LEGISLATION, S. 2123 / H.R. 3713. To contact your Senators and Representative, you may:

✓ Make a Phone Call:
Call your Senators and your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senators'/Congressman's offices. The switchboard phone number is (202) 224-3121 (see message section, below).

✓ Write a Letter
To write letters to your Senators, send them to:
The Honorable (name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

✓ Send a Fax
If you would like to send a fax, call your Senators' or Representative’s offices (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for their fax numbers (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ Send an E-Mail
To send an e-mail to your Senators, go to www.senate.gov; click on “Find Your Senators”. Look up your Senators by state; go to their web sites for e-mail addresses. To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on “Write Your Representative” (on the left hand side, just under “find your Representative). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT BOTH YOUR SENATORS!!!!!!

THE MESSAGE

- The current bicameral, bipartisan support for sentencing reform presents us with a unique opportunity to meaningfully reform a significant aspect of our broken criminal justice system.

- We need to seize this opportunity and enact aggressive reforms based on what has worked and what we know has lead to the problems with which we are faced today.

- Over the last 30 years, there has been a 500% increase in incarceration; almost 60% of the people in prison or jail right now are racial or ethnic minorities while we comprise just over 27% of the national population.

- S. 2123 / H.R. 3713 marks a good start, yet more can, and should be done to reform the sentencing policies of our nation. This legislation must be seen as a beginning, not the full cure or the end of the ills which are pervasive in our system.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!
If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

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To become an NAACP member or to sign up for e-mail legislative and press updates, visit www.naacp.org
(date)

The Honorable ___________________________
United States Senate / House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.  20510 / 20515

RE:   SUPPORT FOR A GENUINE REFORM OF OUR NATION'S SENTENCING STRUCTURE: STRENGTHEN AND PASS S. 2123 / H.R. 3713

Dear Senator / Representative _______________________________

As your constituent, I would like to share with you my strong support for comprehensive sentencing reform that will genuinely and aggressively address the myriad of problems facing our nation today; specifically, the fact that too many people are being sent to prison when other alternatives would be more appropriate and effective, and the unacceptable racial disparities of those men and women who are locked up. The current bicameral, bipartisan support for sentencing reform presents us with a unique opportunity to meaningfully reform a significant aspect of our broken criminal justice system. We need to seize this opportunity to enact aggressive reforms based on what has worked and what we know will address the problems with which we are faced today.

The bi-partisan legislation, S. 2123 / H.R. 3713 is a good start, yet more can, and should be done to reform the sentencing policies of our nation. S. 2123 / H.R. 3713 must be seen as a beginning, not the full cure or the end of the ills which are pervasive in our system. Specifically, we need to enact aggressive sentencing reforms, including:

- The increased use of evidence-based sentencing alternatives, including drug, Veteran, and mental health courts;
- Reducing recidivism through educational and job training opportunities for prisoners while they are incarcerated (this includes restoring Pell grant eligibility to prisoners);
- A concentration on using prison space for career or violent criminals;
- The elimination of all mandatory minimum sentences, and an increase in judicial discretion; and
- In depth reports to Congress by the Department of Justice on the extent to which reforms have addressed both over-incarceration and racial disparities.

I stand ready to work with you and to and support the ultimate strengthening and enactment of S. 2123 / H.R. 3713 and to enact genuine sentencing reform. Please contact me soon to let me know what you are doing and what I can do to help you.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and remember to include your address)