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February 23rd, 2018

House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Nadler and Members of the Committee,

We write to express support for H.R. 4261, the “SAFE Justice Act,” cosponsored by Representatives Bobby Scott (D-VA) and Jason Lewis (R-MN). This bipartisan legislation represents the kind of thoughtful, comprehensive measure that is crucial in addressing many of the problems affecting our criminal justice system today.

All stages of the criminal process are in need of reform, from how we define offenses and charge crimes to how we sentence and rehabilitate offenders. Our jails and prisons are overburdened with too many individuals who are often incarcerated for too long. This places a heavy toll not only on the individuals incarcerated and their families, but also on our society at large and limited government budgets. Similarly, our community corrections systems are used too infrequently as an alternative to incarceration. They are also in desperate need of additional resources and evidence-based strategies for reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community.

The SAFE Justice Act would begin to remedy some of these ills through measures targeted at each part of the criminal justice lifecycle. The Act would require the federal government to catalog the thousands of offenses already on the books. This would be an important first step toward reducing overcriminalization and advancing necessary mens rea reform. The bill also addresses mandatory minimum sentences associated with various non-violent drug offenses, helping to bring the penalties more in line with the relative seriousness of each offender’s transgression. Further, it tackles our system of community corrections, providing incentives to prisoners and probation officers alike to help individuals avoid incarceration and become productive members of society once again. The SAFE Justice Act’s promotion of recidivism reduction measures would not only lower the burden on our jails and prisons, but would also help to improve public safety.

Systemic reform is a tall order, but the SAFE Justice Act makes admirable strides in the right direction. The Act’s common sense approach to improving our criminal justice system deserves bipartisan support. We encourage the Judiciary Committee to mark up this legislation and work in a bipartisan manner to further improve and advance its reforms.

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