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President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Subject: An Urgent Plea for Comprehensive Criminal Justice Reform - Repealing the '94 Crime Bill and Supporting the Next Step Act and Smart Sentencing Adjustments Act

Dear President Biden,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits. I am writing to you as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at New York University Silver School of Social Work, a dedicated Criminal Justice Advocate, and a Formerly Incarcerated Citizen. I approach you with a sense of urgency and deep concern regarding the pressing need for comprehensive criminal justice reform in our nation.

Firstly, I would like to commend your Administration for its commitment to criminal justice reform, evident in the proclamation designating April 2023 as [Second Chance Month](#). Additionally, your recent actions, including the commutation of sentences for individuals serving harsh terms for drug offenses and pardons related to certain marijuana charges, demonstrate a willingness to address some of the injustices within our criminal justice system. However, there remains a critical aspect that requires immediate attention – [the repeal of the '94 Crime Bill](#).

In light of extensive research, impassioned advocacy, and the “new consensus” emerging from the collective wisdom of elected officials and influential leaders, it is undeniably clear that the '94 Crime Bill stands as an outdated and draconian piece of legislation. Countless articles and tireless advocates have shed light on the destructive consequences it has wrought, particularly in black and brown communities. Recognizing its role in perpetuating harm rather than fostering justice, there is an urgent and unequivocal call for the repeal of the '94 Crime Bill, symbolizing a critical step towards rectifying historical injustices and forging a more equitable path forward for marginalized communities.

Senator Elizabeth Warren's 2020 campaign brought forth a detailed and comprehensive plan for criminal justice reform, prominently featuring [the repeal of the 1994 crime bill](#). In her proposal, Senator Warren acknowledged that the punitive 'tough on crime' approach embedded in the '94 Crime Bill was a mistake and needed to be repealed. She astutely suggested retaining sections related to domestic violence while emphasizing that the bulk of the law must go. Her nuanced approach, supporting parts of the original bill that have since expired and wouldn't be part of the repeal, reflects a thoughtful strategy to rectify the injustices perpetrated by this legislation.

As someone who shares Senator Warren's perspective and understanding of the flawed nature of the '94 Crime Bill, I implore you to consider the urgency of its repeal. This legislation, which you were involved in during your tenure as a senator, has had a lasting and detrimental impact on marginalized communities. Repealing it is not an erasure of the past but a courageous step towards acknowledging and rectifying the mistakes of history.

Furthermore, I urge you to throw your full support behind Senator Cory Booker's [Next Step Act](#) and [Smart Sentencing Adjustments Act](#), building on the momentum created by the First Step Act. The Next Step Act, introduced in 2019 and the 2023 Smart Sentencing Adjustments Act, stand as a continuation of the bipartisan efforts to reform our criminal justice system. Its provisions are carefully crafted to address critical issues such as sentencing reform, prison conditions, law enforcement training, and re-entry efforts.

The undeniable influence of federal policies, notably exemplified by the 94 Crime Bill, has cast a profound shadow on state-level sentencing guidelines, contributing to the implementation of unduly harsh measures. Federal funding, wielded to expand the criminal legal system, has played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of incarceration. However, in a transformative shift, the Smart Sentencing Adjustments Act emerges as a beacon of change, poised to reverse this trend. This legislation not only seeks to rectify the punitive consequences of past policies but stands as a groundbreaking initiative to incentivize states in a diametrically opposite direction. By encouraging reductions in both incarceration rates and crime through innovative strategies, the Smart Sentencing Adjustments Act signifies a progressive step toward dismantling the punitive legacy of the 94 Crime Bill and fostering a criminal justice system rooted in fairness, rehabilitation, and community well-being.

Your [campaign promise](#) to substantially reduce the federal prison population resonated with many, and your administration has taken commendable steps. However, it is evident that more needs to be done, especially as we witness the continued growth of

the federal prison population under your tenure. Your predecessors, including Donald Trump, demonstrated bipartisan support for sentencing reform through the [First Step Act](#), resulting in the early release of nearly 30,000 individuals. It is not too late to fully embrace this momentum and solidify your commitment to meaningful criminal justice reform.

As an advocate, educator, and formerly incarcerated citizen who continues to support your administration, I implore you to recognize the importance of these issues, particularly as we approach the 2024 election cycle. Despite historical bipartisan support for sentencing reform, there is a growing concern that the relative inaction on this matter may impact key voting groups.

Having experienced the direct impact of these policies, I now dedicate myself to addressing the profound implications within communities, alongside elected officials, organizations, and individuals. Your commitment to these critical issues holds immense sway in the pursuit of justice and opportunity. As someone who navigated the repercussions of these policies firsthand, I understand the transformative power of reform, and your advocacy resonates deeply with those striving for a more equitable and just system. Your influence can catalyze meaningful change, fostering a system that not only rectifies past injustices but also provides pathways for redemption, growth, and a truly inclusive society for all returning citizens.

Your leadership in accelerating reform, akin to Donald Trump's commitment to the First Step Act, can contribute significantly to rectifying the flaws within our criminal justice system. By repealing the '94 Crime Bill and championing comprehensive legislation like the Next Step Act and the Smart Sentencing Adjustments Act, you can solidify your legacy as a leader who actively addressed mass incarceration and promoted justice, fairness, and compassion within our society.

I appreciate your attention to this pressing matter and remain hopeful that your administration will take bold and decisive steps towards comprehensive criminal justice reform.

Sincerely,

Terrence Coffie

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