

## Support the Bipartisan Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) urges Senators to cosponsor and swiftly pass the bipartisan Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 1917), which would implement both sentencing and prison reforms, reducing disproportionately lengthy prison sentences for low-level offenses and helping better prepare incarcerated people for successful reentry into society.

Beginning in the 1970s, the “War on Drugs” produced harsh mandatory minimum sentences that lengthened prison terms across the board. As a result, our prison population exploded. Today we incarcerate roughly 25% of the world’s prison population despite representing just 5% of the world’s population. Despite similar usage rates, black people are 10x as likely to be arrested for drug offenses, and similarly more likely to be sentenced to longer terms than white defendants.

### Pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 1917)

Although we are concerned about the establishment of new mandatory minimums and the lack of alternatives-to-incarceration programs, we believe this bill is a pivotal step in ending mass incarceration. Most importantly, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 1917) would:

- Reduce the harshest drug and gun-related mandatory minimums, and allow some reforms to apply retroactively based on a judge’s review of individual sentences.
- Grant judges discretion to reduce juvenile life-without-parole after 20 years.
- Allow compassionate release of more people over the age of 60, and essentially ban juvenile solitary confinement in the federal system.
- Direct the Justice Department to review existing programs to determine which most effectively rehabilitate incarcerated people and restore their place in community life.

### Our Rationale

Meaningful reform legislation must include robust sentencing reform that reduces harsh mandatory minimums and grants judges greater discretion to sentence below prescribed mandatory minimums. While prison reform is certainly necessary, it alone cannot make the system more just. Long sentences and mandatory incarceration for minor drug offenses, which make up about half of all arrests, have not deterred drug use or reduced addiction rates. Mandatory minimums are the single largest factor in the growth of our prison population.

Mandatory minimum sentences for low-level drug offenses that are deemed disproportionately lengthy should apply retroactively. People unjustly languishing in jail based on the prior mandatory minimum requirements should have the opportunity to challenge their imprisonment under the new laws. As long as we continue to feed broad swaths of the American public into our prison system, any bill that lacks sentencing reform is simply a band-aid solution.

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*The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the hub of the Jewish community relations network, representing over 125 local Jewish community relations councils and 16 national Jewish agencies. Together our network builds consensus on behalf of the entire Jewish community to promote a just and pluralistic American society, advocate for human rights around the world, and support Israel's quest for peace and security.*