



Durbin urges Senate colleagues to support bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation

November 15 2018 2:57 PM

WASHINGTON – In a speech on the Senate floor, U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, today encouraged his Senate colleagues to support the revised *First Step Act*, bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation. The legislation includes key sentencing reforms from the [Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act](#) – a bill authored by Durbin and Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-IA), which passed the Senate Judiciary Committee in February by a vote of 16-5.

“Later today, Senator Grassley and I will introduce the legislation that President Trump endorsed yesterday. And we will begin working to build the support needed to pass this legislation this year,” Durbin said. “This could be one of the most important things we do when it comes to criminal justice not only this year but for a long time. I commend my colleagues for their cooperation on that and I hope we can get this job done in the closing weeks of this session.”

In his speech on the Senate floor, Durbin also shared the story of Alton Mills. In 1994, at the age of 24, Alton was given a mandatory sentence of life without parole for a low-level nonviolent drug offense. Durbin sent then-President Obama a letter asking him to commute Alton’s sentence. In December of 2015, Alton was released after 22 years behind bars. He now works as a mechanic at Chicago Transit Authority, got married, and is a community college student, where he is pursuing an associate’s degree. In February 2016, Durbin [hosted](#) Alton in Washington, D.C. to speak at a Senate forum on criminal justice reform.

In February, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted to advance comprehensive legislation led by Durbin and Grassley that focuses mandatory minimum prison sentences on the most serious drug offenders and violent criminals, while giving judges

more discretion to determine an appropriate sentence for individuals with minimal non-violent criminal histories. The [*Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act*](#) is cosponsored by 32 senators, divided equally between Republicans and Democrats, and has earned the support of numerous stakeholders from across the political spectrum, including civil rights, faith, and law enforcement groups.

In 2010, Durbin worked with then-Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) to pass the [*Fair Sentencing Act*](#), which eliminated the five-year mandatory minimum sentence for simple possession of crack and dramatically reduced the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine.

Since 1980, the federal prison population has grown by over 700 percent, and federal prison spending has climbed nearly 600 percent. Today, the United States holds more prisoners, by far, than any other country in the world. Overcrowded federal prisons consume one quarter of the Justice Department's discretionary budget, which undermines other important priorities, such as preventing crime and treating drug addiction.