



Durbin, Lee Introduce Smarter Sentencing Act

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, introduced bipartisan legislation that would modernize federal drug sentencing policies by lowering certain mandatory drug sentences. The Smarter Sentencing Act gives federal judges the authority to conduct individualized reviews to determine the appropriate sentences for certain nonviolent drug offenses.

“Mandatory minimum penalties have played a large role in the explosion of the U.S. prison population, often leading to sentences that are unfair, fiscally irresponsible, and a threat to public safety,” Durbin said. “The First Step Act was a critical move in the right direction, but there is much more work to be done to reform our criminal justice system. I will keep fighting to get this commonsense, bipartisan legislation through the Senate with my colleague, Senator Lee.”

“Our current federal sentencing laws are out of date and often counterproductive,” said Lee. “The Smarter Sentencing Act is a commonsense solution that will greatly reduce the financial, and more importantly the human, cost imposed on society by the broken status quo. The SSA will give judges the flexibility and discretion they need to impose stiff sentences on the most serious drug lords and cartel bosses, while enabling nonviolent offenders to return more quickly to their families and communities.”

Lee and Durbin first introduced the Smarter Sentencing Act in 2013. Several important reforms from the Smarter Sentencing Act were included in the landmark First Step Act, which was enacted into law in 2018. The central remaining sentencing reform in the Durbin-Lee legislation would reduce mandatory minimum penalties for certain nonviolent drug offenses. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that implementation of this provision would save taxpayers approximately \$3 billion over ten years.

Along with Durbin and Lee, the bill is cosponsored by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Angus King (I-ME), and Tim Kaine (D-VA).

The Smarter Sentencing Act is endorsed by the following organizations: American Conservative Union, Americans for Prosperity, Americans for Tax Reform, Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, Dream Corps JUSTICE, Due Process Institute, FAMM, Federal Public and Community Defenders, FreedomWorks, Justice Action Network, National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, Prison Fellowship, and R Street Institute.