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United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

June 25, 2015

Dear Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in the United States and Canada, we urge your support of the *Smarter Sentencing Act* (S.502). Our experience of working with and advocating on behalf of incarcerated youth, adults and ex-offenders has shown us that one-size-fits-all sentencing policies are counterproductive and fail to address the complex challenges posed by the criminal justice system.

The Smarter Sentencing Act reforms sentencing practices by expanding judicial discretion related to non-violent drug offenses, allowing judges to evaluate the appropriate penalty for such offenses in light of the circumstances of each case. The bill also reduces mandatory minimum sentences for some drug crimes and allows crack cocaine offenders to seek more equitable sentences under the *2010 Fair Sentencing Act*.

The Catholic Church recognizes civil authority's duty to enforce laws designed to protect people and advance the common good. Our faith also teaches that all people are redeemable and possess inherent human dignity. In their letter *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote, "We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or re-integration of all into the community."

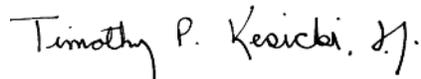
Our criminal justice system is the largest in the world. The incarceration rate has grown by 500 percent over the past three decades. In 2013, nearly 7 million people were under some form of correctional control. Estimated incarceration costs approach approximately \$80 billion annually. Rather than spending billions to continue this record-setting incarceration trend, we should make smart investments in crime prevention, rehabilitation, education, substance abuse treatment, and reintegration.

Harsh sentencing policies for non-violent offenses are costly and detrimental to the well-being of individuals, their families, and their communities. Finding suitable housing, stable employment, addiction and recovery programs, and proper physical and mental health care are only a few of the challenges faced by ex-offenders as they reintegrate into society.

While imperfect, the *Smarter Sentencing Act* marks the beginning of crucial reform in our nation's criminal justice system. Pope Francis recently reminded us that, "God is in everyone's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else." We join the Pope's call by advocating for sentencing policies that lead to healing, restoration, and hope.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. Please contact Matt Cuff (mcuff@jesuits.org) for more information.

Sincerely,



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Rev. Michael Kennedy, SJ
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