

May 8, 2018

Honorable Bob Goodlatte  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Jerrod Nadler  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Nadler:

On behalf of Just Detention International (JDI), I am writing in support of the First Step Act, a criminal justice bill that is currently being reviewed by the U.S. House Judiciary Committee. The First Step Act will advance efforts to reform our criminal justice system by improving conditions inside U.S. federal prisons, including through meaningful rehabilitation programs. The First Step Act will also strengthen the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) — the landmark 2003 law that has made detention facilities safer, but whose flawed auditing system must be fixed.

Founded in 1980, JDI is the only organization in the world dedicated exclusively to ending sexual abuse behind bars. JDI was instrumental in PREA's passage, working closely with a broad coalition that included civil and human rights organizations, elected officials from both parties, and formerly incarcerated people who survived this violence. JDI also was deeply involved in the push for robust PREA standards, which were finalized by the Department of Justice in 2012, and currently works to ensure their swift and full implementation.

Our support for the First Step Act is based on our extensive work with current and former prisoners, who regularly tell us that the lack of adequate rehabilitation programs serve as a barrier to their reintegration into society. We are also pleased to see that the bill places limitations on restraints for pregnant and post-partum prisoners, and allows placement of prisoners closer to home — provisions that undoubtedly will help improve the wellbeing and dignity of inmates.

In addition, the bill targets a glaring problem with PREA's oversight mechanism. Since the release of the PREA standards, scores of dangerous prisons and jails have been found to be compliant with the PREA standards following their PREA audit. The First Step Act would improve dramatically the quality of the auditor pool by ensuring that auditors adhere to established guidelines and are held accountable for subpar assessments.

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The First Step Act represents only the beginning of a sustained effort to create a fairer, safer criminal justice system. More work is needed to ensure that every person behind bars is treated with dignity and has a chance to lead a full, healthy life both behind bars and when they are released. The First Step Act will get us on the path to the true reform that we so badly need. We urge you to support this legislation when it comes before the Judiciary Committee this week.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lovisa Stannow', with a stylized, cursive script.

Lovisa Stannow  
Executive Director