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January 8, 2016

**AFRICAN AMERICAN MAYORS ASSOCIATION AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS
URGE CONGRESS TO ACT SWIFTLY IN PASSING CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM LEGISLATION**

Dear Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate:

We, the undersigned mayors and local law enforcement officials, are in strong support of the bipartisan Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 (S. 2123) that would make great strides in reforming the federal criminal justice system.

S. 2123 will have broad impact in our cities by reforming mandatory minimum sentences and applying retroactively the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which reduced the disparity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine. Such measures will also have a profound and positive impact on communities with significant minority populations. Historically, such populations have been disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system.

Further, S. 2123 couples sentencing reform with providing additional tools for ex-offenders to reenter society. In particular, S. 2123 provides juvenile offenders a second chance to succeed in society by requiring additional protections around parole, and imposing limitations on the use of solitary confinement, which could have long-term effects on the mental health of young and vulnerable individuals. When an ex-offender has the opportunity to become a productive member of society upon release, it is a win for all of our cities.

In June 2015, the African American Mayors Association launched a Justice Reform Task Force to address reforms such as those provided in S. 2123. Since that time, mayors have been working hand-in-hand with local law enforcement officials to address reforms on the ground. Accordingly, we urge members of Congress to pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 without delay.

However, we are deeply concerned by the House Judiciary Committee proposal to implement a default mens rea requirement for criminal offenses. The Criminal Code Improvement Act would create uncertainty and confusion that jeopardizes public safety and should be withdrawn and not impede the passage of S. 2123.

In conclusion, we applaud this bipartisan effort, and urge the quick passage of S.2123, which will greatly improve the criminal justice environment in our communities.

Sincerely,

Stephen K. Benjamin
Mayor of Columbia, SC
President, African American Mayors Association



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3.	Terry Wright	Brunson, SC
4.	Stephen K. Benjamin	Columbia, SC
5.	William "Bill" Bell	Durham, NC
6.	Lester Taylor	East Orange, NJ
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8.	Wayne Hall	Hempstead, NY
9.	Michael Wolfe, Sr.	Hempstead, TX
10.	William Johnson	Holly Hill, SC
11.	Svante Myrick	Ithaca, NY
12.	Tony Yarber	Jackson, MS
13.	Sylvester "Sly" James	Kansas City, MO
14.	Frank Minor	Logan Township, NJ
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16.	Malinda Miles	Mount Rainier, MD
17.	Eulis Willis	Navassa, NC
18.	Toni Harp	New Haven, CT
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	<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>City</u>
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26.	W.H. "Skip" Holbrook	Chief of Police	Columbia, SC
27.	Joshua Detter	Chief of Police	Holly Hill, SC
28.	Lee Vance	Chief of Police	Jackson, MS
29.	Marshand Crisler	Commissioner of Public Safety	Jackson, MS

About AAMA

The African American Mayors Association (AAMA) is the only organization exclusively representing over 500 African-American mayors across the United States. AAMA seeks to empower local leaders for the benefit of their citizens. The role of the AAMA includes taking positions on public policies that impact the vitality and sustainability of cities; providing mayors with leadership and management tools; and creating a forum for member mayors to share best practices related to municipal management.