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July 10, 2006

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.  
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2138 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2142 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Representative Conyers:

We understand that the Committee may soon consider H.R.1704, the Second Chance Act, bipartisan legislation to support successful reentry of prisoners into our communities and to reduce recidivism. I write on behalf of the American Bar Association to express our strong support for this much-needed legislation and to urge the Committee to approve it so that it may soon be considered by the full House of Representatives.

The ABA strongly supports efforts to improve correctional policies to increase the chances that prisoners, once released, will be equipped to become productive citizens and not engage in criminal activity. In August 2003, the ABA adopted a set of standards, *Collateral Sanctions and Discretionary Disqualification of Convicted Persons*, which seek to establish a legal framework for dealing with unreasonable discrimination against convicted persons, and to limit laws that unfairly disqualify offenders from a multiplicity of benefits and opportunities solely because of their conviction record. In 2004, the ABA House adopted policy that urges jurisdictions to adopt programs and policies to prepare prisoners for release back into the community and to assist prisoners after their release with transitional housing, job placement assistance, and substance abuse avoidance. This summer the ABA will consider a series of recommendations dealing with employment and licensing of offenders, and use of and access to criminal record information.

Each year, 650,000 people, on average, are released from prisons back into our communities. Of these, almost two-thirds are expected to be rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years. This high rate of recidivism is

attributable at least in part to a lack of effective reentry programs, either in prison or after release.

Prisoners upon release face countless barriers when trying to reenter society, and societal costs are high when they fail. Many of the more than 650,000 ex-offenders who are released annually have little to no money, no home, and no one to whom they can turn. Our failure to prepare people leaving prison for reentry into the community is a major cause of homelessness. The 650,000 people leaving prisons and the thousands more leaving jails each year often return to communities where persistent poverty, lack of jobs and affordable housing makes finding a permanent home difficult. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, expenditures on corrections alone rose from \$9 billion in 1982 to \$44 billion in 1997. Add to that the enormous cost of both arrest and prosecution, and it is evident that this is an area in need of serious reform.

The Second Chance Act of 2005 is an important first step toward reducing the unacceptably high recidivism rate among ex-offenders and saving taxpayers money. The legislation authorizes assistance to states and localities to develop and implement strategic plans for providing and coordinating programs to provide critical assistance to ex-offenders to help them reunite with families, find housing, continue substance abuse and mental health counseling, seek education and find jobs. The bill also establishes a federal inter-agency task force on offender reentry, provides for research on reentry, and creates a national resource center to collect and disseminate information on best practices in offender reentry.

We believe there is strong bipartisan support for moving forward on targeted reforms aimed at strengthening community efforts to reduce recidivism, and further believe that the Second Chance Act represents the best opportunity for the current Congress to take such a positive step forward. We urge the Committee to reject any attempts to weaken the bill and to approve H.R.1704 promptly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans".

Robert D. Evans

cc: Members of the Committee