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AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
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March 3, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
144 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
123 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association to urge you to support funding for FY 2010 for the Second Chance Act. The Second Chance Act, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law in April 2008, is a common sense, evidence-based approach to reducing crime and improving public safety. It authorizes \$165 million for each of two years, providing a critical, short opportunity for a modest investment in “back-end” crime prevention that represents a tiny fraction of federal spending on the criminal justice system. The ABA believes it is imperative that we take advantage of this opportunity by fully funding the Act.

The bill authorizes \$165 million for programs that will improve coordination of reentry services and policies at the state and local levels. The Second Chance Act includes a \$55 million program for State and Local Reentry Demonstration Projects, which improve coordination of reentry initiatives and implement evidence-based practices. The Second Chance Act also authorizes a \$15 million program for Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Organizations, which provide mentoring and other transitional services to adults and youth returning from correctional facilities.

Funding the Second Chance Act will also provide crucial resources for successful prisoner reentry at a time when they are desperately needed. In 2007, federal and state prisons held just under 1.6 million inmates – one in every 198 U.S. residents – and released 725,000 individuals back to our communities. And more than 9 million individuals are released from jail each year. Unfortunately, most face numerous challenges when returning to the community from prison or jail, and research indicates that over half are reincarcerated within three years of their release. In a recent report, The Pew Charitable Trusts estimated that, if current growth rates continue, state and federal

prisons will grow by 13 percent by 2013, adding more than 192,000 prisoners at a cost of \$27.5 billion. According to the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, jails are growing at an even faster pace. However, research confirms that comprehensive, coordinated services can help formerly incarcerated individuals find stable employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism. In these difficult economic times, the barriers to housing and employment will be even greater than in the recent past, and it is all the more important that the Second Chance Act programs be implemented to provide needed assistance and help to ward off recidivism.

By establishing programs to provide the resources needed to coordinate reentry services and policies at the state and local level, the Second Chance Act ensures that the tax dollars spent on corrections will not simply fuel a revolving door in and out of prison and jail. State and local governments and nonprofit organizations around the country are eager to launch and expand innovative reentry programs, and families and communities are desperate to access the services the Second Chance Act will provide. We urge the Subcommittee to approve the full authorization of \$165 million for FY 2010 funding for the Second Chance Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas M. Susman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas M. Susman