November 9, 2007

Dear Representative:

We understand that the House of Representatives will soon consider H.R.1593, the Second Chance Act of 2007. I write on behalf of the American Bar Association to urge you to support this strongly bipartisan legislation developed over several years by leaders in both political parties to assist former prisoners successfully reenter our communities and thereby reduce recidivism.

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. Each year, more than 650,000 people are released from prisons and return to their communities. Of these, almost two-thirds are expected to be rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years. The recidivism rate for the one in six offenders returning from prison who are under the age of 21 is even higher. Many hundreds of thousands more adult and juvenile offenders are released each year from jail facilities.

The high rate of recidivism among those being released is attributable at least in part to a lack of effective transitional programs, both in prisons and jails, and in the communities to which they return. The transition from confinement to “life on the outside” presents particularly great risks and opportunities for young people and society, since juveniles released from confinement still have many “prime crime years” ahead of them.

Prisoners upon release face countless barriers when trying to reenter society. Societal costs are high when they fail. The legal barriers to employment and housing for convicted persons make reentry difficult under the best of circumstances, and many of those released from prison return to communities where persistent poverty, lack of jobs, limited access to drug or alcohol treatment, and lack of affordable housing are the norm. Our failure to prepare people leaving prison for reentry into the community thus becomes a major contributor to homelessness.

Prompt enactment of the Second Chance Act is a critical step toward reducing the unacceptably high recidivism rate among people being released from prison and jails. This in turn will not only save the taxpayers money by reducing expenditures on law enforcement and corrections, it will also reduce the other
burdens on society imposed by our high rate of incarceration. In helping to transform the lives of many ex-offenders, the Second Chance Act will have a positive impact on the families and communities from which they came and to which they will return. The unquantifiable cost of broken family relationships is often overlooked in calculating the cost of crime, but there is no doubt that children growing up without one or both parents are more likely themselves to get into trouble with the law. By providing a second chance to criminal offenders, enactment of this legislation will also provide a second chance to their children and families.

We urge you to vote for the Second Chance Act when it is considered on the House floor so that it may soon become law.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Denise A. Cardman
Acting Director