June 28, 2011

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

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Chairman Mikulski and Ranking Member Hutchison:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association to urge you to support funding for FY 2012 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 programs to assist prisoners to successfully reenter their communities, providing a critical 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. With an understanding and sensitivity to the fiscal constraints facing the federal government, the ABA nonetheless believes that funds spent to reduce recidivism are investments that will more than pay for themselves in long-term savings to society and the criminal justice system.

The Act authorizes support for programs that will reduce recidivism and improve coordination of reentry services and policies at the state, tribal and local levels, including demonstration grants, reentry courts, family-centered programs, substance abuse treatment, employment, mentoring and other services needed to improve transition from prison and jail to communities.

The Second Chance Act will provide crucial resources at a time when they are desperately needed. In 2008, federal and state prisons held over 1.6 million inmates – one in every 198 U.S. residents – and released 735,000 individuals
back to their communities. More than 9 million individuals are released from jail each year. Unfortunately, most individuals face numerous challenges when returning to the community from prison or jail, and research indicates that over half are re-incarcerated 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.

Over 250 Second Chance grants have been awarded to community and faith-based organizations as well as state, local and tribal governments spanning almost every state in the country. The Second Chance Act has fueled the public/private partnerships required to tackle the complex task of reducing recidivism. To support grantees and the reentry field at-large as they face this challenge, the Second Chance Act also established the National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC). The NRRC helps organizations that have typically struggled to implement effective practices within a field long-deprived of the education, training, and technical assistance required to enhance public safety.

By providing the resources needed to coordinate reentry services and policies, the Second Chance Act ensures that the tax dollars spent on corrections no longer support a revolving door in and out of prison and jail. State, tribal 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 authorized funding of $165 million for FY 2012 for the Second Chance Act.

Sincerely

Thomas M. Susman

cc: Members of the Subcommittee