October 18, 2017

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Conyers Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 2899 - Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2017

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers:

On behalf of the American Bar Association, I write to express our support for H.R. 2899, the Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2017, and to urge the members of the House Judiciary Committee to approve the bipartisan bill without weakening amendments and report it to the full House of Representatives for its consideration.

The ABA, with over 400,000 members from across the nation, has strongly supported the Second Chance Act since it was first introduced in 2007. The ABA believes that reauthorization of this Act is essential to continuing the evidence-based and cost-effective support for programs that have improved reentry from prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities, reduced recidivism, and increased public safety.

The Second Chance Act was signed into law in 2008 with strong bipartisan support. Since then, the Department of Justice reports that over 700 Second Chance Act grants have been awarded to government agencies and nonprofit associations from 49 states and the District of Columbia for reentry programs serving adults and juveniles. These programs have already served more than 137,000 people by providing employment training, education, housing, and other support needed to help them transition back to community life after completing their sentence. Second Chance Act-funded programs in states like Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Tennessee have resulted in reductions in re-arrest rates and increases in employment and educational opportunities available to participants in these programs. Improvements in access to housing is particularly important because it allows returning citizens to obtain employment and comply with the conditions of their release.

Second Chance Act grant improvements during the last nine years are a good start, but there is more work yet to be done to help the transition from incarceration back to society. At the end of 2015, there were still an estimated 1.53 million prisoners being held in state and federal facilities across the United States. Over 608,000 people were admitted into prison in 2015 alone, and
641,000 were released back to their communities. More than 9 million individuals are released from jails each year. Targeted “smart on crime” programs like the Second Chance Act grants that support comprehensive, coordinated services to enable formerly incarcerated individuals find stable jobs and housing help reduce recidivism, reliance on incarceration, and public spending on corrections and must be continued.

By providing the resources needed to coordinate reentry services and policies at the state and local levels, reauthorization of the Second Chance Act will ensure that the tax dollars spent on corrections do not simply fuel a revolving door in and out of prison. State and local governments around the country, as well as community and faith-based organizations, will get resources that they desperately need to address prisoner reentry and recidivism-reduction efforts in their communities and help those who have paid their debt to society get back on the right track.

We urge the members of the Judiciary Committee to support H.R. 2899 so that it can soon be considered by the full House of Representatives and enacted into law. If the ABA can provide any assistance in this process, please contact Holly Cook in the ABA’s Governmental Affairs Office at 202-662-1860 or holly.cook@americanbar.org.

Sincerely,

Hilarie Bass

cc:    Members of the House Judiciary Committee