The Second Chance Bill

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House of Representatives passes Second Chance Act - 11/13/2007

Senate passes Second Chance Act - 3/11/2008

Sent to White House for signature of President - 3/11/2008

President signs Second Chance Act 4/9/2008

(for text, audio and video of signing click

here.

America Should Believe in a Second Chance

by Congressman Danny K. Davis

America has more of its people in prison than any other developed nation in the world - more than two million. The vast majority, 95% of the men and women in our prisons will eventually return to the community. That means that every year more than 650,000 offenders are released from state and federal prisons and return back to civilian life.

These men and women deserve a second chance. Their families, spouses and children, deserve a second chance and their communities deserve a second chance. A second chance means an opportunity to turn a life around. A chance to break the grip of a drug habit. A chance to support a family, to pay taxes, to be self-sufficient.

Today few of those who return to their communities are prepared for their release or receive any supportive services. When the prison door swings open an ex-offender may receive a bus ticket and spending money for a day or two. Many leave prison to return to the same environment which saw them offend in the first place. But, as they return they often face additional barriers to reentry: serious physical and mental health problems, no place to stay and lack of education or qualifications to hold a job. As a result two out of three will be rearrested for new crimes within the first three years after their release. Youthful offenders are even more likely to re-offend.

One third of all correction departments provide no services to released offenders, and most departments do not offer a transitional program, placing a heavy burden on families and communities. Considering the cost of incarceration (as much as $40,000 per year) and all the social and economic costs of crime to the community it's just common sense to act to help ex-offenders successfully reenter our communities and reduce recidivism.

That's why I have sponsored the bipartisan
Second Chance Act of 2007 (HR1593)
along with Representatives Cannon, Conyers, Coble, Scott of Virginia, Smith of Texas, Jones of Ohio, Forbes, Schiff, Sensenbrenner, Chabot, Jackson-Lee of Texas, Cummings, Johnson of Georgia, Clarke and 75 other Members of Congress. A companion bill (S1060) has been introduced into the Senate sponsored by Senators Biden, Specter, Brownback, Leahy, Obama and 10 other Senators.

The Second Chance Act will provide transitional assistance to assist ex-offenders in coping with the challenges of reentry. It will reduce recidivism. It will help reunite families and protect communities. It will enhance public safety and save taxpayer dollars. It is the humane thing to do. It is the responsible thing to do. It is the right thing to do.

The Judiciary Committee held hearings on the bill in April 2007 and quickly voted to send the bill to the full House. I fully expect it to pass very soon. The bill has the support of more than 200 criminal justice, service provider, faith based, housing, governmental, disability and civil rights organizations. President Bush has signaled his support of the legislation as well.

No single piece of legislation is going to solve the reentry crisis we are facing, but the Second Chance Act is a good start. I hope that with the passage of this bill we will begin a new era in criminal justice.

I am convinced that any serious effort to facilitate the reentry of men and women with criminal records to civil society must be prepared do two things. First, we must be prepared to help with drug treatment on demand for everyone who requests it. Second, we need to find work for ex-offenders. Programs won't supply jobs. After ex-offenders have undergone rehabilitation and received appropriate training employers will have to open their hearts and put these men and women back in the work force or they will surely and certainly end up back in prison.