

TULSI GABBARD
2ND DISTRICT, HAWAII

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
SEAPOWERS AND PROJECTION FORCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1102

300 ALA MOANA BOULEVARD, ROOM 5-104
HONOLULU, HI 96850
(808) 541-1986

1609 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4906

<http://www.gabbard.house.gov>

June 26, 2015

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
B-351 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers,

Thank you for offering Members of the House the opportunity to submit comments as you craft legislation to reform the nation's criminal justice system. I look forward to working with you as the process continues.

Our current criminal justice system has many problems, and will require systemic change to successfully rehabilitate prisoners while reducing recidivism. One area in which my homestate of Hawaii has shown success in reducing recidivism is through the Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) model, a high-intensity supervision probation program.

This model has produced remarkable results. A National Institute of Justice evaluation of the Hawaii HOPE program found that probationers in the program were 55 percent less likely to be arrested for a new crime; 72 percent less likely to use drugs; 61 percent less likely to skip appointments with their supervisory officer; and 53 percent less likely to have their probation revoked than probationers not in the program. Numerous other states have established similar programs, including Texas, South Dakota, and Alaska.

Reform to the criminal justice system must include support, in both funding and technical assistance to states, for new approaches such as HOPE, to make the system successful. Under the HOPE program, probationers are warned that he or she will receive swift, certain, and fair sanctions – typically resulting in several days in jail – for each detected violation, such as drug use (based on random testing) or missed appointments with a probation officer.

Another important aspect of the system that must be included in reform is our juvenile justice system. Young people involved in the system face paths that can lead to dramatically different lives, and we must have a system that puts them on a path for success.

Hawaii's juvenile justice system is implementing the Hoopono Mamo Civil Citation Initiative, which is an "innovative collaboration to divert youth away from juvenile court involvement and connect them to a community-based system of support." Stakeholders throughout the state came together to develop this initiative which works with first-time youth offenders to access

supportive services through an assessment center and receive a civil citation rather than be arrested. The assessment center staff works with the youth and his or her family to address challenges the youth is facing. This process focuses on the root issue facing the youth and works through a collaborative approach. While the research on the outcomes of Hoopono Mamo initiative is still being done, it is critical that the federal government support these types of efforts to stem the tide of young people being sucked into the criminal justice system.

Additionally, I have cosponsored H.R. 920, the Smarter Sentencing Act and H.R. 1854, the Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act. Among its most important provisions, H.R. 920 would modernize federal drug sentencing policies by giving federal judges more discretion in sentencing those convicted of non-violent drug offenses. H.R. 1854 would reauthorize the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) and provide additional resources to veterans' treatment courts to help those suffering from behavioral or post-traumatic stress disorders. It offers broader training during police academies and orientation and an increase in corrections-based programs, like transitional services and re-entry programs that reduce the likelihood of recidivism. The bill will help states and counties implement collaborative efforts between criminal justice and mental health systems and will support efforts to identify people with mental health conditions at each point in the criminal justice system. Mandatory sentencing and mental health are major concerns that any reform effort must resolve.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my thoughts with you. I look forward to continuing this dialogue.

Sincerely,



TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress