



U.S. Sentencing Commission

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NEWS ADVISORY

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COMMENT OF HONORABLE PATTI B. SARIS, CHAIR, U.S. SENTENCING COMMISSION, ON AMENDMENT REDUCING DRUG GUIDELINES BECOMING EFFECTIVE TOMORROW

[The United States Sentencing Commission, an independent agency in the judicial branch charged with setting federal sentencing guidelines, voted unanimously in April to reduce sentencing guidelines levels for most drug trafficking offenses and voted unanimously again in July to make that change retroactive. Because Congress has not acted to disapprove the Commission's actions, the amendment becomes effective tomorrow. Offenders sentenced after tomorrow will be sentenced under the new, reduced guidelines, and current prisoners may begin petitioning courts for sentence reductions based on retroactive application of the reduced guidelines. Prisoners can have their sentences reduced if courts determine that they are eligible and a reduction is appropriate, and they may not be released pursuant to such reductions before November 1, 2015.]

“The reduction in drug guidelines that becomes effective tomorrow represents a significant step toward the goal the Commission has prioritized of reducing federal prison costs and overcrowding without endangering public safety. Commissioners worked together to develop an approach that advances the causes of fairness, justice, fiscal responsibility, and public safety, and I am very pleased that we were able to agree unanimously on this reasonable solution. I am also gratified that Congress permitted this important reform to go forward.

This amendment is an important start toward addressing the problem of over-incarceration at the federal level. Commission researchers estimate that applying the amendment going forward may reduce the prison population by 6,500 in five years and far more over time, while more than 46,000 current prisoners could be eligible to have their sentences reduced by retroactive application of the amendment. Still, only Congress can act to fully solve the crisis in federal prison budgets and populations and address the many systemic problems the Commission has found resulting from mandatory minimum penalties. I hope that Congress will act promptly to pass comprehensive sentencing reform legislation.”

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