

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 9, 2015

The Honorable Patti B. Saris, Chief Judge
U.S. District Court for Massachusetts
John Joseph Moakley Courthouse
1 Courthouse Way, Suite 2300
Boston, MA 02210

Dear Judge Saris:

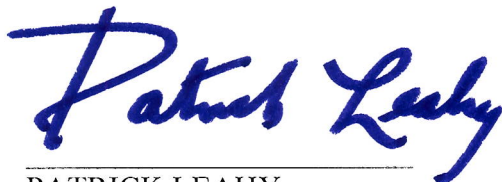
I write to urge the Sentencing Commission to review the sentencing guidelines for animal fighting offenses. In 2008, Congress recognized the brutality of animal fighting and its relationship to other serious crimes by raising the statutory maximum penalty for this offense to five years. The sentencing guidelines, however, were never adjusted to reflect this change. As a result, I am concerned that the guidelines do not adequately convey the seriousness of this offense or provide for specific offense level enhancements in particularly egregious cases.

Although now illegal in all 50 states, animal fighting continues to thrive and every year thousands of animals are subjected to unspeakable acts of abuse and neglect. Not only are these animals, typically dogs, made to live in deplorable conditions that constitute extraordinary cruelty, they are forced to fight, and if they lose, they are frequently killed. Despite the cruelty and suffering often involved, under the current sentencing guidelines a defendant in the most serious criminal history category would face a guideline range of 24 to 30 months -- two and a half years below the statutory maximum. Moreover, the guidelines do not provide for specific offense level enhancements to address greater culpability, for example participation in a large-scale commercial dog fighting operation or offenses involving extraordinary acts of cruelty.

I urge the Sentencing Commission to review the guidelines for this deplorable offense and consider modifying them to better reflect the statutory maximum penalty. I also ask the Commission to consider providing for offense level enhancements when the offense involves particularly outrageous conduct. Animal fighting is a serious crime and our penalties must be proportionate to the cruelty involved.

As always, I appreciate the important work of the Commission and your consideration of my views on this issue.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator