

Remarks by Chair Carlton W. Reeves

Public Meeting of the United States Sentencing Commission

Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Center

August 8, 2024

Good afternoon! I am the Chair of the United States Sentencing Commission, Carlton W. Reeves, and I welcome you all to this hearing. I thank each of you for joining us, whether you are in this room with us or attending via livestream.

I have the honor of opening this meeting with my fellow Commissioners. To my left, we have Vice Chair Claire Murray, Vice Chair Laura Mate, and Commissioner Candice Wong. To my right, we have Vice Chair Luis Felipe Restrepo, Commissioner Claria Horne Boom, and *ex officio* Commissioner Scott Meisler. Commissioner John Gleeson cannot be with us today.

We are also joined by Commission employees, some of whom are in this room, many of whom are not. They have done

the research. They have drafted the priorities. They have set up this room. And they have done so, so much else to make this hearing possible. On behalf of the Commissioners and the public, I thank all our agency's staff for the amazing work they do every single day.

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Each year, the Commission vote to adopt priorities that will guide its annual policymaking process. This summer, we solicited priorities from the public, asking how the agency can improve federal sentencing. In response, the Commission received more than 1,200 pages of insightful comments from judges, members of Congress, executive branch officials, probation officers, advisory groups, attorneys, professors, advocates, organizations, incarcerated individuals, and others.

I cannot express how thankful the Commission is for this overwhelming amount of public feedback. From the halls of the Senate to the desks of prison libraries, countless people took the

time to give us ideas about how to make our criminal justice system fairer. Those ideas are thoughtful. Those ideas are well-researched. And those ideas illuminate the path forward for the Commission. To each and every person who commented: thank you.

I want to give a special note of thanks to the judges who found time in their very busy schedules to follow our work and take the extra step of offering their comment. Our justice system and criminal sentencing system works best when people make these sacrifices. I can't thank you enough. Members of Congress have significant staff to assist them. Judges have just a few law clerks and perhaps a judicial assistant. To use their limited resources and take time away from their dockets to provide input is admirable.

There are a number of clear themes that have emerged from the comments we received. People told us: Simplify the sentencing guidelines and clarify their role in sentencing.

Reduce the costs of unnecessary incarceration. Promote public safety. Improve community supervision. Expand the Commission's use of expertise, evidence, and best practices. And promote evidence-based approaches to offense and individual characteristics. These are just some of the themes we have heard in the comments we have received.

Our vote today to adopt priorities proves one thing: when you speak to the Commission, you will be heard. Our final priorities will allow us to give each public comment the attention it deserves. This is the first step in translating the public's priorities into policies that improve federal sentencing. As we move forward, we will continue to seek out and obtain guidance from the public and stakeholders across the criminal justice system.

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The public tuned in today to hear not only about the Commission's final priorities, but also our decision about

retroactivity. Our final priorities made clear that we are listening closely to the public's recommendations about how to do our work. Many have called for the Commission to identify clear principles that will guide its approach to retroactivity. After deep deliberation, we have decided to heed those calls. For that reason, we will not be voting on retroactivity today. Nevertheless, I want to thank all those who submitted comments and testimony regarding retroactivity for these amendments. Please know that your input has been heard and will continue to be heard as the Commission moves forward.