

Remarks by Chair Carlton W. Reeves

Public Meeting of the United States Sentencing Commission

Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Center

January 24, 2025

Welcome. I want to wish everyone a happy New Year. But as we mark the New Year, we also have many losses to mourn.

News cycles change at a furious pace, and our attention is diverted to various things on any given day. So, I want to begin by addressing something we may have forgotten: the wildfires in California. We express our condolences for all those who have experienced loss. For those who have lost family members, neighbors, and friends. For those who have lost businesses, churches, schools, and houses. And for those who may not have had a house or a building to call their own, but still lost their neighborhood. And we express gratitude for all the first responders keeping people safe. Including people serving out

their sentences as fire fighters, who often earn pennies putting their lives on the line for others. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by this devastation.

I also want to address the passing of President Jimmy Carter. Under each of our last three presidents (that would be Presidents Biden, Trump and Obama) the prison population has decreased. But before them, the last president to preside over such a decline was President Carter, who oversaw a 34% drop in the number of people incarcerated in federal prisons. And over the last two decades, we have seen appointments of federal judges that ensure our courts look like the people they serve. But it was President Carter who started the trend. In his single term he appointed more women and people of color to the bench than all his predecessors combined. President Carter's life reminds us that real and lasting progress is always on the table, so long as we commit to keep moving forward, no matter the circumstances.

Finally, I want to address the absence of two people from this meeting. Two of our Commissioners. Two of our colleagues. Two of our friends, who will not be serving with us anymore. Of course, I am speaking of Judge Claria Horn Boom, and Judge John Gleeson, whose service on the Commission ended earlier this month.

First, let me talk about Judge Boom. Our Kentuckian, proud resident of the Bluegrass State. Our swing judge, proud to serve in two district courts. And our glue, our bond, proud to bring us together over dinners in D.C. and get-togethers in Lexington.

Judge Boom didn't just bring us together. She brought us together in pursuit of rational sentencing policy. She always reminded us of what sentencing looks like on the ground. She always remembered that our policy affected real people: real judges, real probation officers, real victims, and real defendants. She embraces the obligations of judges to look at the whole

person and the nature and circumstances of the offense committed. In other words, she always pointed us to the factors laid out in 18 U.S.C 3553(a). And she always fought for policy tethered to reality, not slogans or ideologies or soundbites.

In a time when misinformation is rampant, Judge Boom always followed the data and the evidence. In a time when independence is disfavored, Judge Boom refused to bow to ideology or partisanship. And in a time when common-sense is often uncommon, Judge Boom always fought for what is reasonable, what is rational, and what is right. We will miss her energy. We will miss her spirit. And we will miss her leadership on this Commission, each and every day.

Now, let me turn to Judge Gleeson. It's not often that you get to meet your heroes. Even less often that you get to work with them. Struggle with them. Fight for justice with them. Or have the immense, extraordinary honor of calling them your friend. But that's what I got to do, serving alongside John

Gleeson, a fellow University of Virginia Law alum, on this Commission.

For decades, Judge Gleeson has been a leader in sentencing reform. The man who started as the prosecutor who took down the mob became the judge who took on unfairness in sentencing. During his time on the bench, Judge Gleeson created a legacy of judicial decisions and opinions that serve as a North Star for any judge pursuing fairness in sentencing.

During his time on the Commission, Judge Gleeson built on that legacy. And he did so by being what he always is: the conscience in the room. Judge Gleeson is a man who refuses to hide his light under a bushel. More importantly, he is a man who inspires others to do the same. To be bold. To be just. To refuse to bend to the prejudices of the day and influences of the hour. Judge Gleeson inspired us all. And that inspiration paid off.

Consider all the common-sense reforms this Commission has created with Judge Boom and Judge Gleeson at the helm. Making federal sentences reflect the latest brain science and psychology around youthful offenses. Creating new provisions to address the harms of fentanyl and illegal gun trafficking. Cutting down on terms of imprisonment not justified by recidivism data. Ensuring that, when sentencing courts look at federal acquittals, “not guilty” means “not guilty.”

It is important to remember what these reforms are. They are bipartisan. They are common-sense. They are evidenced-based. But it is just as important to remember what these policies are not. They are not the last policies this Commission will issue. Judge Boom and Judge Gleeson left a towering legacy behind. The best way to honor that legacy is to build upon it. And I promise we will do so.

Today is a first step in our making good on that promise. It is the next step in our third amendment cycle together as

Commissioners. And it will not be the last step in honoring the legacy of our friends. Claria and John, we know you are watching. We love you. And continue to do justice!

Today, we will vote to propose policies that are bipartisan. Policies that are common-sense. Policies that are evidence-based. And we will continue to propose those kinds of policies so long as Vice Chair Laura Mate and Vice Chair Claire Murray and Vice Chair Luis Felipe Restrepo and Commissioner Candice Wong and *ex-officio* Commissioner Scott Meisler sit alongside me.

And so long as this Commission has a quorum, we and our incredible and dedicated staff will continue to do business. We will continue to study and assess the effectiveness of our sentencing system. We will continue to conduct research and provide data in response to requests from the judiciary, Congress, the Executive Branch, and outside researchers. We will continue to solicit the views of our stakeholders, the public,

and the currently and formerly incarcerated. Solicit your comments. And hear from you. And we will continue to review and revise the guidelines, making sure they fulfill the purposes of sentencing and reflect advancements in human knowledge. Those are the missions Congress tasked us with. And we will continue to fulfill them in this new year.