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Webb's Landmark Criminal Justice Bill Heads For Final Vote

Bipartisan Leaders, Law Enforcement Groups Laud Effort to Comprehensively Review, Reform U.S. Criminal Justice System

Washington, DC (Jan. 22, 2010) — Senator Jim Webb's legislation to comprehensively review and overhaul America's criminal justice system won a major victory today, when the Senate Judiciary Committee approved the measure with bipartisan support. With the backing of thirty-four Senators and dozens of organizations representing a broad spectrum of the criminal justice community, Senator Webb's "National Criminal Justice Commission Act" next goes to the Senate floor for a full vote.

Webb's legislation, which was introduced in the Senate on March 26, 2009 and would create a blue-ribbon commission of criminal justice experts, also received the endorsements today of the Fraternal Order of Police and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

"The overwhelming support from both sides of the aisle for restructuring our criminal justice system is very encouraging for our country," said Senator Webb of today's legislative success. "We are taking an inclusive, broad-based approach here, and I believe that's the best way to move our country away from a system based on ideology and fear, and toward what is fair and what keeps us safe."

Cosponsors of the legislation, Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs Chairman Arlen Specter (D-PA), shepherded the bill through the committee today, with praise from leaders on both sides of the aisle.

Chairman Leahy said, "I believe strongly in securing tough and appropriate prison sentences for people who break our laws. But we must also work to prevent crime and improve the reentry process to reverse the dangerous cycle of recidivism and violence. The findings of a National Criminal Justice Commission will help give us the information we need to do that. Senator Webb has worked hard over the last several months to make this legislation responsive to concerns raised by law enforcement, state and local government officials, and I am pleased that the Judiciary Committee advanced this legislation today."

"Senator Webb has done a prodigious job here, consulting with some 100 organizations, and has established a record showing the need for the crime commission," said Senator Specter.

"Senator Webb has spent an extraordinary amount of time working with people on this committee, and he has certainly worked well with people on our side of the aisle," said cosponsor Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs. "His goal is a worthy one to have a comprehensive review of our criminal justice system. I want to acknowledge his hard work and his effort. I look forward to supporting this bill, and I think it would be good for the country."

"This commission could be a significant commission," said Jeff Sessions (R-AL), the Ranking Member on the Judiciary Committee. "I believe that, as it is framed today, the bill allows the commissioners, without advocacy language, to make the recommendations that they think would help the criminal justice system perform better. Senator Webb has worked very hard on this. This commission provides us an opportunity to comprehensively examine our criminal justice system, and maybe we can make it better."

Senator Webb and his staff have engaged in a dialogue with more than 100 organizations as diverse as the Heritage Foundation, the Sentencing Project, the Fraternal Order of Police, the National District Attorneys Association, the CATO Institute, the NAACP, American Civil Liberties Union, American Correctional Association, the Prison Fellowship, the American Probation and Parole Association, and many other stakeholders across the political spectrum.

One such stakeholder, Marc Mauer, Executive Director of The Sentencing Project, said today, "It has been 40 years since we've had a comprehensive examination of our criminal justice system. Such a review is long overdue."

It is Senator Webb's goal to see the legislation passed in the Senate and enacted into law this year.

For more information about Senator Webb's National Criminal Justice Commission Act, please visit: http://webb.senate.gov/issuesandlegislation/Criminal_Justice_Banner.cfm

A video feed of today's Judiciary Committee hearing is available via Pathfire. Please contact Annie Hughes at: anne_hughes@webb.senate.gov.

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