



September 9, 2013

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
433 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Leahy and Cornyn:

I write on behalf of the members of the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA), who are the state, territorial and tribal administrators of federal justice assistance grant funding. We are grateful for your leadership on a broad range of criminal justice policy issues and, in particular, for your Justice for All Reauthorization bill, S. 822, introduced earlier this year.

Preventing and suppressing crime involves the joint efforts of many at the federal, state, tribal, and local community level. This partnership is essential in developing standards for the gathering and use of DNA technology. It is critical that all levels of government work together to ensure that DNA evidence is appropriately captured, stored, and tested, and that the results are communicated clearly.

The Justice for All Reauthorization Act would extend the key federal programs supporting the proper use of DNA technology, particularly the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant program, an important tool used by states to manage the DNA evidence in their possession. Also, the bill would require the National Institute of Justice to develop a standard definition of backlog, establish best practices and protocols for evidence retention, and authorize funding for training and technical assistance to help crime laboratories and law enforcement agencies better prioritize and test DNA samples. NCJA members appreciate that the bill strengthens these programs without the use of a penalty against the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (Byrne JAG) program.

We are particularly pleased that the bill includes a provision that would strengthen the strategic planning function in the Byrne JAG program. Under the bill, the State Administering Agencies (SAAs) would be required to engage all segments of the state's criminal justice system in a statewide strategic planning process to inform the use of the state's Byrne JAG allocation. Every SAA conducts strategic planning and we know this to be an essential tool for ensuring that Byrne JAG dollars target the highest priority criminal justice needs. Most importantly, the bill would authorize funding for training and technical assistance to the SAAs so they may continually improve upon their strategic planning, leading to more effective programming and better administration of justice in states nationwide.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our views. And, again, we thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Jack Cutrone
President