

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

JOHN BEL EDWARDS
GOVERNOR



P.O. Box 94004
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9004
(225) 342-7015
GOV.LA.GOV

February 15, 2018

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

I write today to correct the record of our U.S. Senator, John Kennedy. On behalf of the people of Louisiana, I apologize for the untruthful comments he made during your mark up of sentencing reform legislation, *S.1917 Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017*. Like our efforts in Louisiana, your legislation is a bipartisan, good-faith effort to overhaul the broken criminal justice system in our country. At a time when Congress is so polarized and unable to get things done because of partisan politics, this is truly a worthwhile effort.

In 2017, the Louisiana legislature and I set out on a path to dramatically overhaul our state's criminal justice system. Republicans, democrats and independents joined together with law enforcement, the business community¹, and community advocates to enact these historical reforms that will eventually remove Louisiana as the nation's highest incarcerator. It was no easy feat, but recognizing that something had to be done to change the status quo and by soliciting input from a variety of stakeholders – conservatives and progressives – we were able to accomplish something monumental.

During your committee hearing, Sen. Kennedy knowingly shared false information with you, and for that, I apologize. The reforms we implemented in Louisiana were based on recommendations of a task force created prior to my taking office. For two years, the task force met and completed the most comprehensive study of the state's criminal justice system in history. Its members included business advocates, law enforcement officials, legislators, a district attorney, a sheriff, and a member of the Louisiana Supreme Court. I am confident that no reform effort in the country had such a diverse coalition as ours in Louisiana. In the end, a compromise plan was developed with input from the Louisiana Sheriff's Association and endorsed by the Louisiana District Attorney's Association².

Under this compromise plan, the state is estimated to save approximately \$262 million, with more than \$180 million of those savings being reinvested in programs that reduce the

¹ [The Advocate: Conservative business groups help carry criminal justice reforms to victory in Louisiana legislature](#) [June 10, 2017]

² [NOLA.com: On Louisiana criminal justice reform, Gov. John Bel Edwards, DAs reach partial compromise](#) [May 2, 2017]

The Honorable Chuck Grassley and Diane Feinstein

February 15, 2018

Page 2

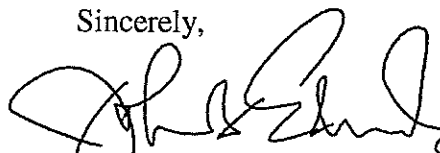
recidivism rate and empower offenders to leave a life of crime behind, resulting in increased public safety for all. Recidivism will never be at zero percent. It was not before the reforms, and our coalition is not naïve enough to think it will be after reforms. However, it will be dramatically reduced and offer offenders an opportunity for a new beginning. We are already seeing the positive results, and I know we will continue to see them going forward. Moreover, the Louisiana reforms follow efforts in other southern, conservative states that saw simultaneous drops in their crime and imprisonment rates following enacting similar reforms. For example:

- Texas: Since their 2007 reforms, the imprisonment rate is down 16%, and crime is down 30%.
- South Carolina: Since their 2010 reforms, their imprisonment rate is down 16%, and crime is down 16%.
- North Carolina: Since their 2011 reforms, their imprisonment rate is down 3% and crime is down 20%.
- Georgia: Since their 2012 reforms, their imprisonment rate is down 7% and crime is down 11%.

I regret that Sen. Kennedy chose to misrepresent Louisiana's bipartisan reform efforts. As is typically the case with his criticisms, they are rooted in political posturing and can rarely be substantiated. In Louisiana, our coalition worked too hard to have its efforts undermined in this manner.

I commend you for your efforts, and if the state of Louisiana and our coalition can be of assistance as you embark on this historic effort, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: The Honorable Richard Durbin
The Honorable Lindsay Graham
The Honorable Mike Lee
The Honorable Patrick Leahy
The Honorable Jeff Flake
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
The Honorable Cory Booker