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Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
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Thank you, Chairman Mollohan and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am here as the executive director of the Justice Policy Institute, a research and policy organization working to reduce incarceration, to express my organization's disappointment with the proposed Department of Justice budget. In our view, this budget perpetuates the misplaced priorities and ineffective policies of our criminal justice system. Rather than helping financially-strapped state and local governments, increased spending on prisons and policing will swell their rates and costs of incarceration. Rather than attacking the racial disparities in the system, this budget will certainly magnify them. Instead of investing in juvenile justice system improvements and programs to serve at-risk youth, this budget will only further the cycle of incarceration that has characterized this country's history for the past three decades.

The administration has requested almost \$700 million for law enforcement services. At a time when crime rates continue to fall, there is no legitimate rationale for spending scarce federal dollars on over-policing. The other day I heard an ad on the radio for a local college, which advised listeners to train for law enforcement, since that's where the federal government was putting its money. If a goal of this expansion is to create jobs, there are a host of other professions we could invest in that would have a greater impact on public safety.

There were no ads for addiction counselors, even though most people in jail or prison meet the criteria for substance abuse addiction. There were no ads for teachers, though most people in jail and prison don't have a high school diploma. There were no ads for social workers, even though many families are struggling, in communities that offer limited opportunities. By investing in more policing rather than in people and their communities, we are guaranteeing that we will be paying for more prisons for years to come.

There is wide praise for Senator Webb's Second Chance Act, which helps people leaving prison reintegrate into the community. "Making it" after prison is difficult, especially in a tough economy where having a conviction on your record is your resume's ticket to the rejection pile. And while we support funding for re-entry, it is equally urgent for you to refocus your spending away from areas which will grow the number of people with convictions. Our research shows that more policing results in more arrests of people for low-level, nonviolent drug offenses. Even well-meaning programs like drug courts can widen the net of criminal justice control, as a lack of community treatment pushes police and judges to funnel people through the justice system. Likewise, mental health courts are a poor substitute for community-based mental health care, which is unavailable and unaffordable for many Americans.

Back in 2006, Congress passed the Adam Walsh Act. JPI strongly urges you to strike from this budget funding to induce states to comply with this Act. While we all want to keep our families and especially our children safe, expanding sex offender registries--particularly by including youth on them-- is counterproductive to public safety and expensive for states. It is a punitive and populist response rather than sound public policy.

Finally, we urge Congress to consider the public safety impact that can be gained elsewhere in the budget. For instance, for every dollar invested in drug treatment in the community, there is a savings of \$18 in crime related costs. And funding for community mental health services block grants has not risen in years. If we could increase high school completion rates by 1%, researchers say the U.S. could save over \$1 billion a year in reduced crime costs. With the inclusion of \$210

million in the U.S. Department of Education budget for Promise Neighborhoods, it is clear that the Administration does understand the value of community investment. This program has the potential to produce lasting improvements in communities around the country, through integrated education, health, employment and social services -- all of which are tied to reductions in justice-system involvement. By rejecting overspending on policing and prisons, Congress and the administration could fund programs like this at a higher level, improving life trajectories and public safety at the same time.

Inasmuch as the budget expresses our vision for the future, we urge you to reject a future that creates jobs through imprisonment, and instead uses its resources to create a healthier, more prosperous and safer society through positive investments in people and communities. Thank you.