



**BREAK THE CHAINS**  
Communities of Color and the War on Drugs  
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**July 5, 2007**

**President George Bush  
Senators and Representatives**

Forty years ago this nation declared a “war on drugs”. Unfortunately, despite billions of dollars spent on this war, the rate of drug use and addiction has remained pretty much the same. The human and social costs of the “war on drugs” have been steep, especially for poor black communities. From racial profiling to incarceration and post-conviction sanctions, to drug treatment and disease prevention, African-American communities are being devastated by discriminatory drug law enforcement and punitive sentencing policies.

In 1986 Congress enacted new laws creating mandatory prison sentences for most drug offenses and abolishing parole in the federal system. In response to a serious outbreak of cocaine abuse, involving a new, smokeable form of the drug known as ‘rock’ or ‘crack cocaine’ Congress singled out crack cocaine offenses for the severest penalties. Under these provisions crack cocaine offenses are punished 100 times more severely than powder cocaine offenses. A five year mandatory prison sentence is imposed for the sale of a mere five grams of crack cocaine; it takes the sale of more than 500 grams of powder cocaine to receive the same sentence. Congress further singled out crack cocaine for special punishment when it required a sentence of five (5) years for a first offense of *possession* of five grams or more of crack cocaine. There is no federal mandatory minimum sentence for first time *possession* of powder cocaine or any other currently illicit drug.

Over the past 20 years, there has been widespread criticism by civil rights organizations, jurists, criminal justice professionals and others regarding the 100:1 disparity and its impact on African-American defendants. Government surveys have consistently shown that drug use rates are similar among all racial and ethnic groups. For crack cocaine, **two-thirds of users in the U.S. are white or Hispanic**. Research demonstrates that the majority of drug users buy from people who are of the same racial or ethnic background as they are which means that **the majority of crack cocaine sellers in the U.S. are not black**. Despite these well known facts African-Americans continue to bear the brunt of federal crack cocaine prosecutions. Indeed in 2005, more than **80% of federal crack cocaine defendants were African-American**.

Reforming the current crack cocaine sentencing scheme would reestablish flexibility in the process, redirect federal resources towards major drug traffickers and restore some confidence in our commitment to an unbiased justice system. The United States Sentencing Commission reported that changing this one sentencing rule would do more to reduce the sentencing gap between blacks and whites “than any other single policy change,” and would “dramatically improve the fairness of the federal sentencing system.”

We, the undersigned urge the elimination of the mandatory five year sentence for crack cocaine possession, and the equalization of sentences for crack and powder cocaine offenses at the levels currently established for powder cocaine. Let’s demonstrate compassion for people caught in the net of addiction regardless of the form of drug they abuse. Twenty-one years of racial injustice is too long - justice delayed is justice denied.

Sincerely,

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