June 16, 2010

Dear Member of Congress:

I write on behalf of the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA). NCJA members include the state, territorial and tribal administrators of federal justice assistance programs. NCJA members would like to express their support for the creation of a national criminal justice commission, as envisioned by H.R. 5143, the National Criminal Justice Commission Act.

Over 40 years has passed since a similar commission was constituted in the Johnson Administration. That commission’s work was widely seen as a success in large measure because many of its policy recommendations were adopted at the federal and state levels and remain important features of our national criminal justice policy today.

As the state officials responsible for criminal justice planning and administration, NCJA members believe that this is the right moment in history to undertake a broad review of our nation’s criminal justice policies and practices. Because of the severe budget crisis, state and local policymakers are rethinking past practices and are eager to find successful, cost effective strategies for preventing and reducing crime. They are also eager to adopt policies which are likely to sustain declining crime rates. Also states are committed to adopting new approaches to prevention, pretrial diversion, courts and corrections reform, reentry, and information sharing strategies. A national commission will provide an opportunity for review and dissemination of best practices, discussed in the context of a system-wide review of the criminal justice system. This is important because any changes in law enforcement policy necessarily will impact the functioning and effectiveness of the courts, prosecution and defense, pretrial services, correctional systems, and more.

NCJA members (also known as State Administering Agencies or SAAs) welcome a national discussion about the many issues they are grappling with at the state level, and the opportunity to learn from experts across the criminal justice system. By authorizing the creation of such a commission, Congress will provide a mechanism for advancing evidence-based practices across the nation. This is a worthy goal for which NCJA members offer their full support.

Sincerely,

Roland Mena
President