December 10, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid  The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader  Minority Leader
United States Senate  United States Senate
S-221, United States Capitol  S-230, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner  The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker  Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives  U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, United States Capitol  H-204, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515  Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators and Congressmen:

As Congress seeks to reach agreement on avoiding the fiscal cliff, we write to urge you to adopt a balanced approach to deficit reduction which recognizes the significant contribution already made by the non-defense discretionary (NDD) portion of the federal budget, including the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) state and local justice assistance grant programs. Further cuts to NDD and the DOJ grant programs will eviscerate the crucial role the federal government plays in crime control by the spurring of innovation, as well as the testing and replicating of evidence-based practices nationwide.

Congress already has cut federal discretionary spending by well over $1 trillion over ten years through the Budget Control Act (BCA) and prior spending cuts. Since FY10, NDD spending has dropped by about 17 percent. This means that by FY21, NDD spending as a share of the Gross Domestic Product will have dropped to just 2.8 percent, the lowest level since the 1950’s. And this is before the 8.2 percent automatic across-the-board cuts required by the sequester in FY13 and the additional reductions required by a lowering of the caps on discretionary spending each year through FY21.

Moreover, the state and local justice assistance grant programs have fared far worse than NDD overall. The DOJ grant programs have contributed almost $1.5 billion to deficit reduction, a decrease of 43 percent since FY10. Further, the state and local grant programs have borne the lion’s share of DOJ’s overall cuts in order to support increases in funding for the federal Bureau of Prisons, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the other federal law enforcement and investigative agencies and activities. In FY11, the state and local grant programs were cut by about $900 million, more than the $700 million cut from the Department’s budget overall. In FY12, although overall funding for DOJ increased slightly, the grant programs were cut by another $570 million.

We are deeply concerned that these past cuts, as well as those yet to come if sequestration is triggered and the caps on overall discretionary spending are lowered further, will have a direct impact on the public safety and quality of life in our communities.

Crime has dropped to the lowest levels since the 1960’s. This is due, in large measure, to advances in crime prevention and recidivism reduction supported by the federal grant programs. Because of federal support from the Department of Justice, we are able to test innovative strategies, measure results, and replicate successful practices in additional communities.
Criminal justice is a complex system that is changing rapidly. Regional, national and even international gangs and drug trafficking organizations penetrate deeply into our cities and towns. For these reasons and others, crime fighting today is very different than it was a decade ago. We recognize that criminal justice is a system that can only be successful if all parts of the system – prevention, enforcement, courts, corrections, and community supports – are in balance, utilize strategies rooted in data, and consistently measure performance. The federal contribution to state and local criminal justice services is very small (only 3.3 percent of the amount spent by state and local governments according to a 2008 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics), but it is the much-needed spark which allows state and local governments, as well as our organizations and local partners, to test new initiatives and coordinate across the justice system to find solutions that work.

Crime prevention is absolutely central to our nation’s economic recovery. Business does not invest where crime flourishes. And individuals often need support, treatment, and tools for stable employment if they are to become productive members of society who contribute to our nation’s economic vitality.

Finally, the federal grant programs have been the catalyst for many initiatives that have brought about cost savings and broad changes in state criminal justice policy. States serve as the laboratories for these initiatives which, once proven successful, can be replicated on the federal level. Texas, Ohio, Kansas, Michigan, and many other states have shown remarkable success in reducing crime, lowering recidivism, restoring families, and saving taxpayer money – all at the same time. Programs based on the Justice Reinvestment model can be adopted in the federal prison system in order to reduce overcrowding, break the cycle of recidivism, and reduce the rate of growth in the Bureau of Prisons’ budget.

As practitioners and local, state, and national organizations that work across the entire criminal justice system - including juvenile delinquency prevention, crime prevention, law enforcement, victim services, prosecution, indigent defense, drug and other problem solving courts, corrections and community corrections, correctional reform, drug and substance abuse treatment, and post-correctional support services - we know first-hand the indispensable role the federal grants play in our success. The reduction in federal funding since FY10 has been truly devastating, as reported by respondents to a survey conducted in the summer of 2012 by the National Criminal Justice Association and the Vera Institute of Justice. Crime fighting budgets have been slashed, jobs have been cut, and the impact has been felt across the criminal justice system. (To read a summary of the survey results, visit www.ncja.org.) It is critically important that this federal, state, local partnership is cut no further.

We thank you for the work you do, and we ask that any deficit reduction agreement avoid further cuts to NDD and the Department of Justice’s state and local justice assistance grant programs.

Sincerely,

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Paul Gerard, Probation Officer, Meigs County Court
Pomeroy, Ohio

Lucy Wagener, Executive Director, the Children’s Advocacy Center of Portage County, Inc.
Ravenna, Ohio

Jacqueline Shemas
Reynoldsburg, Ohio

Sarah Reynolds, Director of Victim Assistance, Erie County Prosecutor’s Office Victim Assistance
Sandusky, Ohio

Michele Barksdale
Solon, Ohio

Laurie Armstrong, Pastor, Calvary Presbyterian Church
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Darlene Bruce, Shelter Manager, Tri County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Cathy Campbell, Executive Director, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Kelly Carter, Chief Probation Officer, Belmont County Juvenile Court
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Mary Donnelly, Administrative Coordinator, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Faith Ferrell, Board Member, Tri County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Elizabeth Hull-Frye, Licensed Professional Counselor, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Michele Nardo, Court Advocate, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Judy Oberdick, Board Member, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio

Lorrinda Saxby, Board Member, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
St. Clairsville, Ohio
Joell KopyarThompson, Billing Coordinator, Tri-County Help Center, Inc.
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Toledo, Ohio

Kendra Kec, Assistant Court Administrator, Lucas County Juvenile Court
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Troy, Ohio

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Wadsworth, Ohio

Mike Bowers, Case Manager, Auglaize County Correction Center
Wapakoneta, Ohio

Nick Bellas, Community Service Supervisor, Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership
Warren, Ohio

James Corfman, Executive Director, NEOCAP
Warren, Ohio

Isabel Seavey, President, AAUW of Warren-Trumbull County
Warren, Ohio

Regina Waris, Co-Director, NEOCORR
Warren, Ohio

Mary G. Wilson, Assistant Professor, Kent State University Trumbull
Warren, Ohio

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Washington Court House, Ohio

Valerie Metz, Victim Advocate, Fayette County Victim Witness Division
Washington Court House, Ohio

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Waverly, Ohio

Kate Foulke
Westerville, Ohio

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Westerville, Ohio

Peggy Lobb, Faculty Instructor, Otterbein University
Westerville, Ohio
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Wilmington, Ohio

Rhiannon Whalen, Community Education Coordinator, Every Woman's House
Wooster, Ohio

Stefanie Day, Executive Director, Dwave
Worthington, Ohio

Ali Kisker, Advocate, Dwave
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Megan VanFossen, Volunteer Advocate, SARNCO
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Xenia, Ohio

Oklahoma
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Durant, Oklahoma

Deedee Cox, Executive Director, Community Crisis Center
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Patty Davis, Executive Director, AWEC
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Marcia Smith, Executive Director, OK Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
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Amanda Doran, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Program of North Central Oklahoma
Ponca City, Oklahoma

Amanda Doran, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Program of North Central Oklahoma
Ponca City, Oklahoma

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**Tennessee**
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