

ALL SOULS EPISCOPAL PARISH

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April 27, 2021

Senator Ben Allen
State Capitol, Room 4076
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT for SB 483 (Allen) – RISE Act 2021

Dear Senator Allen,

On behalf of All Souls Episcopal Parish, a Christian congregation in Berkeley, we are pleased to support your proposed legislation, Senate Bill 483, the Repeal Ineffective Sentencing Enhancements (RISE) Act of 2021. SB 483 builds off the past California legislative work to eliminate the automatic one-year and three-year sentence enhancements previously imposed on persons currently held in prisons and jails. SB 483 represents a meaningful step towards reducing the harm of overly long and unjust sentences, a harm that disproportionately falls on marginalized and low-income groups most affected by decades of mass-incarceration.

As Episcopalians, our Baptismal Covenant commits us to seek and serve Christ in all persons and “to strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being.” Jesus, in his teachings, emphasizes that working for justice and providing help to those who are suffering are not optional, and in fact, are part of the fabric of our relationship with the Divine. The primary scriptural foundation for our efforts to realize a more just and compassionate community rests in the two great commandments, as Jesus asks us to return to right relationship: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:36-40). Jesus embodied and practiced these teachings by reaching out to the most vulnerable in society – the poor, those suffering from physical or mental illness, and others considered outcasts by the society of his time.

In this legislation, SB 483, we can take a meaningful step to repair some of the damage of past injustice, namely the imposition of prison sentences that were arbitrary and excessive, in the spirit of the prophet Isaiah who calls us to be “the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in” (Isaiah 58:12).

In 2017 and 2019, the Legislature repealed sentence enhancements that added three years of incarceration for each prior drug offense (SB 180 Mitchell) and one year for each prior prison or felony jail term (SB 136 Wiener). However, these reforms apply only to cases filed after these bills became law. Those who were convicted prior to their enactment continue to be separated from their families and communities. SB 483 would ensure the retroactive repeal of these sentence enhancements, ensuring that no one is serving time based on rulings that California has already deemed unfair and ineffective.

SB 483 continues to undo the decades of harm perpetrated by the sustaining ideology that excessive sentences deter crime. Sentencing enhancements have not made our communities safer. Instead, they put significant financial burdens on taxpayers and families statewide—each additional year in prison costs over \$112,600 per person.¹ Retroactively eliminating sentence enhancements would decrease spending currently crippling state and local budgets, and allow for the meaningful reinvestment in desperately needed community services and programs.

Moreover, long prison and jail sentences have been proven injurious to system-impacted people and destabilizing to their families and communities—particularly for Black, Latinx, and Native Americans in the US and California.² Sentence enhancements based on prior convictions target the poorest and most marginalized people in our communities. The longer the sentence, the more severe these problems.

The retroactive RISE Act is another step forward in sustaining legislative momentum to eliminate unjust sentence enhancements and end wasteful incarceration spending in favor of community reinvestment.

All Souls Episcopal Parish, with the affirmed support from our governing Vestry and our Justice & Peace Ministry, strongly supports SB 483 (Allen) and urges the legislature to pass this important bill.

Most Sincerely,

Tonantzin Martinez-Borgfeldt Kim Wong Nydia MacGregor Kirk Miller
Kieran King Howard Perdue Tim Ereneta Melissa Deveraux
Katherine Logan Shawn Adderly

Vestry Members, All Souls Parish

Janet Chisholm Don Gates Lewis Maldonado
Christine Trost Cynthia Clifford Paloma Pavel

Justice & Peace Ministry, All Souls Parish

Rev. Dani Gabriel

Deacon

Rev. Phil Brochard

Rector

¹ Dept of Finance, 2021-22 Governor's Budget, 5225 Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2021)

² Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together, and Research Action Design, "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families" (2015).