U.S. JUSTICE
ACTION NETWORK

Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

The U.S. Justice Action Network supports House Bill 5273, which will establish a more efficient and effective system of providing information to the parole board.

Our organization is the largest bipartisan organization in the country committed to criminal justice reform at the state and federal level. We are comprised of eight of the country's most well-respected progressive and conservative organizations, many of which agree on very little, but all of which agree on the need for comprehensive criminal justice reform that will safely reduce the prison population, eliminate unnecessary and duplicative criminal laws, and strengthen reentry practices to keep our communities safer.

Michigan's Parole Board must consider a tremendous amount of information prior to making a decision on parole, including the nature of the offense, the prisoner's criminal history, prison behavior, in-prison program performance, age, parole guidelines score, risk as determined by various validated assessment instruments and information obtained during the prisoner's interview, if one is conducted, information and feedback from crime victims, and other information. All of these factors are considered for good reason—the Board must have the right information to make an informed decision. However, we must also ensure they consider the most relevant and significant information.

To achieve this goal, the intent of House Bill 5273 is simple: it would ensure a judge's objections to the parole of an individual would only serve as an automatic bar if that judge actually presided over the prisoner's case. Successor judges, or judges that have subsequently taken over the court which handled the case, may still file thoughts and concerns for review and consideration by the parole board.

This merely ensures that only those judges with direct knowledge of a prisoner's case and circumstances have the ability to unilaterally block parole decisions. The feedback of successor judges is indeed helpful in the parole board's work, but given the attenuation to the prisoner's case, should not serve as an automatic bar. And we believe the Parole Board should be able to consider the entire weight of the information and evidence when making a parole decision.

On behalf of our unique coalition, including the ACLU, Americans for Tax Reform, the Center for American Progress, FreedomWorks, the Faith and Freedom Coalition, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Right on Crime and the NAAACP... we urge your support for this common-sense reform legislation.