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October 8, 2004

The Honorable Howard Coble
Chair, Subcommittee on Crime,
Terrorism and Homeland Security
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to express the American Bar Association's support for H.R. 4676, the proposed "Second Chance Act of 2004," legislation that addresses a critical issue facing our nation: how to assist the thousands of inmates released each year from prisons and jails to become productive, law-abiding citizens in their communities.

H.R. 4676, would strengthen collaboration and coordination of prisoner re-entry programs and activities, increase funding to assist states in establishing or improving programs to facilitate the reentry into the community of each offender, and establish a high-level interagency task force to better coordinate reentry programs and activities and identify federal barriers to successful reentry of offenders into their communities.

"America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path should lead to a better life," President Bush noted in his State of the Union Address. "This year, some 600,000 inmates will be released from prison back into society. If they can't find work, or a home, or help, they are much more likely to commit crime and return to prison." Yet over the past two decades, the collateral effects of criminal convictions -- for example, ineligibility for health and welfare benefits, public housing, educational assistance, and certain employment and professional licenses -- have been increasing steadily in variety and severity, and it has become increasingly difficult for those who have served their time to overcome these additional barriers. A regime of ill-considered collateral sanctions may frustrate the reentry and rehabilitation of this population and actually encourage the commission of new crimes.

H.R. 4676 is an important first step towards encouraging states and the federal government to identify and eliminate counterproductive legal barriers that often hamper former offenders from reentering society and becoming productive citizens. The legislation also encourages the creation of effective reentry plans to foster the development and coordination of such programs as health services, education, job training and housing.

We urge swift passage of H.R. 4676.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Robert D. Evans

cc: Members, House Committee on the Judiciary