

PRESS RELEASE

CONGRESSMAN CHARLES RANGEL

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RANGEL TESTIFIES AGAINST COCAINE SENTENCING DISPARITY *Tells Crime Subcommittee That Decades-Old Policy "Isn't Working"*

Congressman Charles Rangel today brought his case for ending the disparity in cocaine sentencing to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. He told the panel that the current 1986 law – which mandates the same 5-year sentence for possession of 5 grams of crack as it does for 500 grams of powder – has failed as a deterrent, and instead, has unfairly condemned many to unreasonably long prison sentences.

Excessively punitive mandatory minimums for crack offenses have led to disproportionate rates of incarceration for Blacks and Hispanics. The Obama Administration last month renewed its call to eliminate the disparity entirely.

"This is a remarkable time in our nation's history. We now have a president who doesn't think how we acted in the past should determine how we move forward in the future," Rangel told the subcommittee. "This policy isn't working. It's not working for Blacks; it's not working for minorities – it's not working for this country."

Congressman Rangel touted his bill, The Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act of 2009, as a way to inject fairness and equity into federal cocaine sentencing. It would remove the mandatory minimum for simple possession of crack – the only such mandatory minimum of its kind – and increase all other crack triggers to powder cocaine levels, resulting in a 1:1 ratio.

Advocacy groups in the audience distributed candy bars before the hearing, highlighting the fact that offenders caught with the weight of one candy bar in crack cocaine get an automatic 10 years in prison. Republican Congressman Roscoe Bartlett and Democratic Congresswomen Sheila Jackson-Lee and Maxine Waters joined Congressman Rangel on the panel to testify in support of eliminating the disparity.

This country houses over 2.2 million prisoners in its jails – that means more than 1 in 100 Americans adults are behind bars. Congressman Rangel pointed to our burgeoning prison population, the most in the world by far, as proof that in addition to the injustice, choosing incarceration over rehabilitation makes little fiscal sense. The United States spends an estimated \$60 billion each year on corrections.

"Locking people in jail doesn't make any monetary sense; it doesn't make any social justice sense," Rangel said. "The whole system, I would hope, the President and attorney general would want to address. What a message that would send to America and to the world."