

Paula White, Jentezen Franklin, Other Major Faith Leaders Praise Groundbreaking Legislation

The Senate passed the First Step Act last night with an overwhelming majority, 87-12.

The prison-reform bill would ease the way for some prisoners to win early release to halfway houses or home confinement, according to *Reuters*, and aims to establish programs to head off repeat offenders and protect first-time non-violent offenders from harsh mandatory minimum sentences.

“It’s something that’s so important to the faith community. I believe the heart of the First Step Act is redemption. It’s actually an opportunity to give nonviolent prisoners a chance to rebuild their lives. If they, through years of good record and contributing and taking care of their families, do right, then they can actually have the word ‘felon’ taken off their permanent record. They’ll be able to get better jobs and build their families for generations with blessing instead of the curse of having that word,” Jentezen Franklin previously told *Charisma*.

Major faith leaders, including key Pentecostal preachers, advocated for the legislation and praised the vote as a groundbreaking step forward that can advance the kingdom of God.

Here’s what they are saying:

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference:

I enthusiastically commend the U.S. Senate for working in such an admirable, pragmatic, and most importantly, bipartisan fashion yesterday by passing the FIRST STEP Act with an overwhelming majority. Likewise, President Trump deserves a great deal of credit for championing this historic piece of legislation, as does Jared and Ivanka Kushner, who worked diligently behind the scenes with both parties, as well as with faith and minority communities like the NHCLC, to push this bill across the finish line.

As I've said so many times before, Americans believe in second chances. It's a part of our national character. The Bible likewise boldly states when talking about the new believer, 'the old is gone, the new has come.' If God holds out hope for each one of us, we must do the same as a nation. By expanding judicial flexibility to override sentencing minimums for non-violent offenders; through enhanced recidivism-reduction measures including faith-based programs; and common-sense reforms such as increasing access to halfway houses and other transitional opportunities, the FIRST STEP Act affirms this divine hope, that people can, and often do, change when given the opportunity. We thank God that yesterday, the U.S. Senate reflected the heart of the American people, and in so doing, proved that when we put aside partisan division and vitriol, we can come together for the good of the nation.

Jentezen Franklin, senior pastor of Free Chapel:

What has happened this week in the U.S. Senate is nothing short of monumental. Republicans and Democrats, people from a wide range of the ideological spectrum, fought hard to see our criminal justice system reformed. And now, the First Step Act has cleared its hurdle in the Senate – overwhelmingly.

It's been an honor to be a part of these conversations in Washington D.C. and I'm thankful for the hard work the

President and members of both parties have done to make this a priority. We believe we can keep our communities safe and also be a people that believe in redemption. Our prisons need to be places of rehabilitation, and the First Step Act gets us one step closer to that dream.

This week, God has given us a special moment in our nation's history. There is hope for unity and bipartisan reform in these polarizing and divisive times. Americans are hungry for serious work to be done in this country. Legislators and activists of every political persuasion have shown that when they put aside what's political expedient, there is more common ground than we think.

Johnnie Moore, member of President Donald Trump's unofficial evangelical advisory board:

This entire effort originated at Jared and Ivanka's table during a dinner for evangelicals in the White House on the eve of the National Day of Prayer in 2017. Sitting just one seat over, I will never forget listening to Rev. Samuel Rodriguez and Jared Kushner discussing their shared passion to reform America's prisons. What began with the evangelical community became one of the single greatest moments of bipartisan unity in the last 30 years. It wouldn't have happened without our community, brave Democrats (like Van Jones) who would stand with the administration for justice and—most of all—the tireless and brilliant work of Jared Kushner, who brought us and held us together.

James Ackerman, president and chief executive officer of Prison Fellowship:

We applaud the Senate for taking a bold step for federal criminal justice reform by passing the First Step Act. This legislation will help reduce recidivism by preparing men and women to fulfill their God-given potential through

restorative programming, including improved substance-abuse treatment programs, life-skills classes, and vocational training—building job readiness to fuel local economies. This is about getting smart on crime by giving men and women, made in the image of God, the tools to change their lives.”

Thank u @RepDougCollins! This is fantastic news!

– Jentezen Franklin (@Jentezen) December 19, 2018

Thanks!!!

– Dr. Darrell Scott (@PastorDScott) December 19, 2018

What an awesome victory for all Americans with an 87-12 vote for the #FirstStepAct with Prison Reform! I am grateful and honored to all who worked so hard to get this done, especially Jared Kushner! I believe in second chances and redemption! #changinglives

– Paula White-Cain (@Paula_White) December 19, 2018

Congratulations to US Senate for passing @POTUS’ Criminal Justice Reform with an overwhelming Bipartisan vote tonight! The First Step Act will reduce recidivism, make communities safer & save taxpayer dollars. House should vote to send this HISTORIC reform to @POTUS’ desk ASAP!

– Vice President Mike Pence (@VP) December 19, 2018

Thank you, United States Senate. The #FirstStepAct has been a long time in the making, and it is a good and needed development.

– Russell Moore (@drmoore) December 19, 2018

The U.S. Senate just passed the bipartisan First Step Act by a vote of 87-12. This criminal justice reform bill has been a key part of our legislative agenda and we are thankful for the broad coalition that led to this victory!

– ERLC (@ERLC) December 19, 2018

Ronnie Floyd, pastor at Cross Church and president of the National Day of Prayer:

If there's a group of people who should believe in the power of forgiveness and second chances, it's Christians. We have been forgiven beyond measure by God, and we know that same forgiveness is available to everyone else, including people who have made mistakes in life.

This is why the First Step Act is in many ways a reflection of the gospel. It offers prisoners an opportunity for restitution and restoration. But we also need to remember that nobody really goes to prison alone. Every prisoner is someone's son or someone's daughter, someone's father or someone's mother. When someone is sent to prison, the whole family pays the price for the crime.

This act, therefore, goes beyond offering an opportunity to prisoners for a second chance at life. It offers families an opportunity for a second chance at being a family. I'm delighted the Senate has made such a strong statement on this issue. There's nothing our nation needs more right now than love and forgiveness in action.

Craig DeRoche, senior vice president of advocacy and public policy, Prison Fellowship:

Ninety-five percent of those who are incarcerated today will eventually be released back into our neighborhoods—failing to prepare people returning from prison endangers communities and wastes human potential. Today, the Senate refused to

double down on the failed policies of the past. The First Step Act's passage reflects America's growing demand for smarter and more restorative solutions to crime.

Jason Yates, CEO of My Faith Votes:

The First Step Act is about breaking hopeless cycles. It has broken the cycle of partisan dysfunction in Washington, passing with overwhelming support from both parties. More importantly, its reforms aim to break cycles of recidivism among federal prisoners, to hold them accountable to step out of chronic patterns of criminality and provide them with the tools and treatment to overcome past offenses and become thriving members of society.

My Faith Votes has prayerfully supported the bill and encouraged thousands of Christians to contact their senators to encourage a yes vote. We praise God for the opportunity faith leaders have had to bring the influence of our Christian faith into this legislation, many of its key components marked by echoes of the incomprehensible grace and redemption pictured in the gospel of Christ. All Americans can be grateful Congress worked together to deliver these reforms, and grateful for an administration that, from beginning to end, championed the bill because it is genuinely interested in second chances for those who've made mistakes and are committed to putting their lives on the right path.

The #firststep legislation is a big win for all who believe in redemption and reformation. I celebrate the leadership of our President and Sr Advisor Jared Kushner and the diligent, prayerful support of evangelical Christians who believe God is the God of second chances

– Jack Graham (@jackngraham) December 19, 2018

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