DATE

Senator Scott Wiener

State Capitol, Room 5100

Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for SB 378 (Wiener) re: probation alternatives for drug offenses**

Dear Senator Wiener:

On behalf of ORGANIZATION, I write in strong support of SB 378 (Wiener), legislation to grant judges appropriate discretion in sentencing drug offenses. This bill will not change the upper penalty for any offense, but will provide judges the discretion to grant probation or to suspend a sentence in the interests of justice for offenses that are currently ineligible or presumed ineligible for probation. The repeal of mandatory minimum sentences has long been a priority for reform organiztions nationwide, but is even more urgent in the time of COVID-19, as our state and local governments seek solutions to jail overcrowding and the danger of rapid spread of a deadly airborne infection.

Since the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, the United States and California have refocused on the cruel, violent, and racist inequities of policing and incarceration. It is well known that the war on drugs has been disproportionately waged against African-American and Latinx families, separating parents from children and causing long-term collateral consequences, including loss of job opportunities, housing and education benefits.[[1]](#endnote-1) This continues to be true, even in light of evidence that drug use and drug sale rates between whites, blacks and Latinx are approximately equal in our state and in our country. According the California Attorney General’s Office,[[2]](#endnote-2) in 2016 blacks made up 16.5% of felony drug arrests (while blacks make up only 6.6% of the state population), and Latinos made up 41.3% of felony drug arrests (while Latinos make up 24.4% of the state population between the ages 19 and 54.).[[3]](#endnote-3)

Our organization supports SB 378 (Wiener) and lends our voice to the broad coalition seeking sentencing reform, including the repeal of mandatory minimum sentences.

Respectfully,

NAME

TITLE, ORGANIZATION

cc: Office of Senator Scott Wiener c/o angela.hill@sen.ca.gov

Norma Palacios, Drug Policy Alliance npalacios@drugpolicy.org

Glenn Backes, Drug Policy Alliance glennbackes@mac.com

1. Drug Policy Alliance: Race and the Drug War. http://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/race-and-drug-war [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. California Dept of Justice. Crime in California 2016. <https://oag.ca.gov/crime> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. US Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/CA> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)