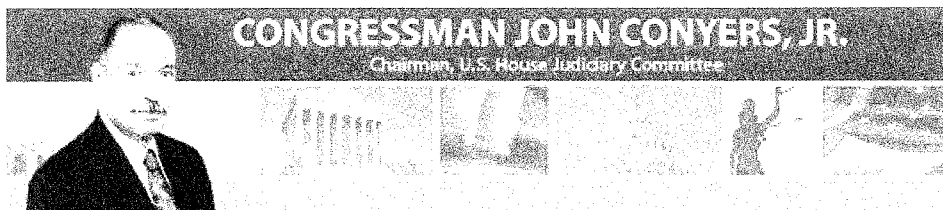


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## Conyers Bill Passes to End Crack Cocaine Sentencing Disparity



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(Washington) – House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.) today hailed the passage of H.R. 3245, the Fairness in Cocaine Sentencing Act of 2009. This legislation would end "100 to 1" crack-powder cocaine sentencing disparity by eliminating the distinction between the two forms of the drug in federal law.

Scientific and medical research have concluded that crack and powder cocaine have essentially the same effects on a person's brain. Four reports issued by the U.S. Sentencing Commission to Congress on the Federal cocaine sentencing policy have all urged Congress to change the current federal crack cocaine law. The Commission report in 2007 reiterated its 2002 findings that the "current penalties overstate the harmfulness of crack cocaine as opposed to powder cocaine."

"We have taken a big step today toward ending the disparity that exists between crack and powder cocaine sentencing," said Conyers. "African Americans serve almost as much time in federal prison for a drug offense (58.7 months) as whites do for a violent offense (61.7 months), largely due to sentencing laws such as the 100-to-1 crack-powder cocaine disparity. Since 1980, the number of offenders in federal prisons for drug offenses has skyrocketed from less than 5,000 to almost 100,000 in 2009. Currently, drug offenders represent 52% of all federal prison inmates.

"The time is long overdue to fix this law that the U.S. Sentencing Commission agrees disproportionately punishes African-Americans. After many years of hard work on this issue, we are one step closer to eliminating this inequity in federal sentencing."

H.R. 3245 passed the House Judiciary Committee by a 16-9 vote. The bill will next be considered on the House floor.

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