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Statement of Malcolm Jenkins to House Judiciary Committee on Criminal Justice Reform

“NFL Players Speak Up: First Hand Experiences
and Building Trust Between Communities and Police”

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2154 Rayburn House Office Building

Thank you Representative Elijah Cummings and John Conyers. First, I'm honored that all of you are taking the time to allow us the opportunity to speak on criminal justice reform and lend our support on this very important issue.

In 2010, I created my Foundation with the goal to effectuate change in the lives of youth and their families. It was important to me to set up programming and educational opportunities in every city and state in which I have lived, worked and played. That includes my home state of New Jersey, Ohio where I played college football at Ohio State, Louisiana where I won a Super Bowl with the New Orleans Saints, and now Pennsylvania where I am currently with the Philadelphia Eagles. My Foundation has created and supported educational initiatives for youth in underserved communities. We've always stressed that regardless of their economic circumstances, they should have an opportunity to feel valued, empowered and motivated to get an education and become contributing members of society. The majority of youth that we serve are in poverty-stricken communities, and often, those are the same communities in which crime is high and prevalent.

Last summer, when the nation was in turmoil around a large number of police and race related deadly incidents, I had to get involved. I, along with other NFL players, sat down with the Commissioner of the Philadelphia Police and the police department. I gained a larger understanding that the police are the front line of our criminal justice system and there is a disproportion of these incidents with communities of color, especially the African American community. During the meeting with the Commissioner, we agreed that the main issue surrounds the criminal justice system as whole. A lot of the mistrust and anger is aimed toward the police. Even when you create and hold events to bring the police and community together, those same police officers have a job to do. If the community feels the police are there to control or judge, there is no room for trust or feeling of support. My main take away from the meeting was the system needs to be fixed. I realized I needed to learn more. By focusing more on the system and the state that I'm in, I began educate myself through meeting with key grass roots organizations, political leaders and I was recently given a tour of the Graterford Prison. I've learned a shocking amount of information plaguing our youth in Pennsylvania.

- Pennsylvania has sentenced more kids to life in prison without parole than any other state in the country *by far*, and the vast majority of those kids have yet to be resentenced even though a 2012 U.S. Supreme Court decision has said they need to be.
- Kids are *automatically* tried in adult court for crimes such as aggravated assault, robbery, carjacking, and kidnapping whether or not they actually carried them out, even if they were mere accomplices.
- Pennsylvania spends about [\\$42,000 per year, per inmate](#), to incarcerate someone. It would cost much less to invest in community based treatment programs instead of automatically putting them in jail.

The system is flawed. It is unfair for our youth to be automatically tried, especially without evidence or as an accomplice. When a juvenile is arrested, they now have a formal record. The aftermath is that it removes any opportunity for them to get accepted into a college or university or get a job. This translates across all adults.

When I visited Graterford prison, I met a number of incarcerated men who have been in prison since they were teenagers. What opportunities are there for them when they are released into society? It was obvious to me that I wasn't under any threat....I was sitting in a room with multiple offenders who've been in prison for more than 25 years and security guards weren't even present. I know how much I have changed in my life in the last 15 years, so to send a juvenile to a life sentence or tried as an adult at 14 year old is inhumane. What lies ahead for them when they are released into society if they have this scarlett letter? How can these individuals serve as ambassadors to mentor and educate youth in our communities to prevent the cycle?

We need to invest in job training, education, rehabilitation and advancement programs to end the cycle of repeat offenders and arrests. Research confirms that comprehensive, coordinated services can help formerly incarcerated individuals find stable employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism. When they come out of prison, we want them to be contributing members of society, and not perceived as a threat. It's a safety and health issue. If these individuals are being given support and resources, they are more likely to be successful and less likely than to fall back into a life of crime and a danger to their community. How can we expect them to lead a healthy life if they aren't given any options?

Last Congress, the House Judiciary Committee passed legislation that would have provided funding for new, more widely available programming aimed at lowering recidivism rates for formerly incarcerated individuals.

We need to give ex-offenders and currently incarcerated individuals opportunities to turn their lives around through successful drug recovery programs, job training, and mental health treatment. Instead of spending money locking people up we can invest in helping people overcoming their past and starting anew. 2/3 of release inmates will end up back in jail in 3 years. That rate of recidivism costs taxpayers millions of dollars, destroys families, and shatters communities.

In Philadelphia, I met with incredible organizations who are doing great work around these issues, including YASP, the Youth Arts Self-Empowerment Project and The Center for

Returning Citizens. But they are operating on a shoestring, and with additional funding, our communities could be much stronger.

Finally, I feel strongly that we need to remove the scarlet letter. We need to take executive action to “ban the box” for federal employers and contractors, so that applicants have an opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications before being asked about their criminal records. If someone has actually paid their debt to society by completing their sentence, they should be given an equal chance.

I believe that the federal government sets the trends down to our state and local communities. I believe that this is a bipartisan issue that can no longer be ignored. I applaud those of you in Congress who recognize the economic detriment that mass incarceration is doing to our communities and hope that this important issue can be addressed and provided the necessary funding to make changes now, in 2017. Our communities need trust and support, and we need to provide them with preventative and advancement resources to stop the cycle. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard today, as our only goal is to strengthen our communities. Thank you.