

**July 28, 2016****Contact:** Christine Leonard, Director, Office of Legislative and Public Affairs(202) 502-4519 | [press@ussc.gov](mailto:press@ussc.gov)

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## U.S. SENTENCING COMMISSION ISSUES COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON CAREER OFFENDER SENTENCING ENHANCEMENTS

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — (July 28, 2016) The United States Sentencing Commission (“Commission”) issued a *Report to the Congress: Career Offender Sentencing Enhancements*, analyzing career offenders’ prior criminal history, incarceration terms and recidivism rates.

Chief Judge Patti B. Saris, Chair of the Commission, stated, “The Commission’s research shows that there are important differences between violent career offenders and drug trafficking career offenders. Based on these findings, Congress should amend the statutory criteria such that career offender status would not be based solely on drug trafficking offenses.”

Currently, a defendant qualifies as a career offender if he or she: 1) is convicted of an offense that is either a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense; and 2) has at least two prior felony convictions. Career offenders face longer incarceration terms, receiving an average sentence of more than 12 years (147 months). As a result of these longer sentences, career offenders now account for more than 11 percent of the total federal prison population. Yet, career offenders are increasingly receiving sentences below the federal sentencing guideline range, often at the request of the government. The research also shows that, compared to “drug trafficking only” offenders, violent career offenders generally have a more serious



In fiscal year 2014, nearly three-quarters (74.1%) of career offenders were convicted of a drug trafficking offense. Drug trafficking offenders often face higher statutory maximum penalties, including life imprisonment. These offenders were also more likely to receive a sentence below the federal sentencing guideline range.

Earlier this year, the Commission voted unanimously to amend the definition of “crime of violence” in the federal sentencing guidelines, with an effective date of August 1, 2016. Chair Saris added, “Based on the report’s findings and recommendations, Congress should adopt a new, single definition of ‘crime of violence’ that is consistent with the Commission’s revised approach.”

The report can be found on the Commission’s website at [www.ussc.gov/research/congressional-reports/2016-report-congress-career-...](http://www.ussc.gov/research/congressional-reports/2016-report-congress-career-...)

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*The United States Sentencing Commission, an independent agency in the judicial branch of the federal government, was organized in 1985 to develop a national sentencing policy for the federal courts.*



## USSC HelpLine

The HelpLine assists practitioners in applying the guidelines.

**CONTACT: (202) 502-4545**  
HOURS: 8:30 A.M. TO 5:00 P.M. (ET),  
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