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**Norton Wants Congress to Eliminate Remaining Racial Discrimination in Cocaine Sentencing**  
**December 11, 2007**

Washington, DC--Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Judicial Nominations Task Force, applauded the unanimous U.S. Sentencing Commission decision today to make retroactive its November ruling equalizing sentences for powder cocaine and crack convictions. At the same time, she said, "The baton has passed to Congress to complete the reform by eliminating the egregious and racially discriminatory remaining disparities in the mandatory minimums courts must continue to use." Under current law, possession of five grams or more of crack cocaine triggers a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison, while possession of any quantity of powder cocaine and most other controlled substances for a first-time offender is a misdemeanor offense punishable by a maximum of one year in prison. Almost 82 percent of those imprisoned for crack are African Americans in contrast to those held for powder cocaine and many other drug offenses.

Today's decision follows yesterday's 7-2 Supreme Court ruling allowing federal judges to give shorter sentences for crack cocaine convictions in order to reduce the 100 to 1 disparity in U.S. sentencing guidelines between amounts held by crack offenders and those sentenced for possessing the same substance in powder form. Norton said, "Congress remains captured by disproved differences between two forms of the same substance. Now that the Court and the Commission both have acted, Congress must complete the job next year in the second half of the 110<sup>th</sup> session, by eliminating this rank injustice in federal law." Norton said that after the Sentencing Commission's November decision eliminated disparities in the guidelines and yesterday's Supreme Court ruling, the decision on retroactivity was "almost inevitably necessary to mitigate the serious harm already done and the unfair damage to many lives."

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Eleanor on Colbert  
(<http://www.colbertnation.com/>)  
colbert-report-videos/218575/february-11-2009/dc-voting-rights-act--eleanor-holmes-norton)



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