



March 16, 2017

Support the Fifth Amendment Integrity Restoration (FAIR) Act, S. 642 and H.R. 1555

On behalf of our activist community, I urge you to contact your senators and representatives and ask them to cosponsor the Fifth Amendment Integrity Restoration (FAIR) Act, S. 642 and H.R. 1555, introduced by Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Rep. Tim Walberg (R-Mich.). The FAIR Act would reform federal civil asset forfeiture laws to increase the evidentiary standard needed to subject property to permanent seizure and restore the presumption of innocence in federal civil forfeiture proceedings.

For far too long, federal civil asset forfeiture laws have been used to seize property merely suspected of a connection to illicit activity. Often, the property owner is not arrested for or charged with a crime, let alone convicted. The burden of proof falls on the property owner, not the government, throwing the presumption of innocence out of the window.

Seizing state and local law enforcement agencies can, through the Department of Justice's Equitable Sharing Program, receive up to 80 percent of the proceeds from the sale of the seized property. This program creates a perverse profit motive to seize property and subject it to forfeiture under an incredibly low evidentiary standard, currently "a preponderance of the evidence," which amounts to a coin flip on the proof the government presents for its claim against the property.

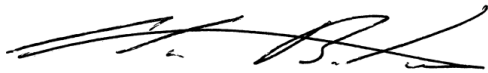
The *Washington Post's* 2014 "Stop and Seize" series highlighted several stories of innocent people whose property was seized and subject to forfeiture through federal forfeiture laws. The *Post* reported that criminal charges were not filed in 81 percent of cases involving the Equitable Sharing Program.

The FAIR Act reforms federal forfeiture laws to increase the evidentiary standard to "clear and convincing evidence," the highest standard in civil cases, and restores the presumption of innocence, placing the burden of proof on the government, where it belongs. The bill would eliminate the Department of Justice's Equitable Sharing Program and send proceeds from forfeitures to the Treasury's general fund, removing the perverse profit motive to seize property and subject it forfeiture.

The rights to private property and due process are among our most basic constitutional protections. The federal government should not be allowed to permanently seize property without presenting clear and convincing evidence that the property is actually connected to illicit activity.

Too many innocent Americans have been negatively impacted by civil asset forfeiture. It's time for Congress to step up and rein in the egregious use of this practice. For these reasons, I urge you to contact your senators and representatives and ask them to cosponsor the Fifth Amendment Integrity Restoration (FAIR) Act, S. 642 and H.R. 1555.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Brandon', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Adam Brandon
President
FreedomWorks