

August 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The undersigned organizations urge Congress to include the *Medicaid Reentry Act* in its next COVID-19 response package. This bipartisan legislation would permit Medicaid to support essential health care for 30 days prior to release and upon reentry, providing for more coordinated care for people in carceral settings and who are reentering. Access to and coordination of physical, mental health and substance use disorder care is especially important during this pandemic.

It is estimated that over 100,000 people in carceral settings nationwide have become infected with COVID-19. Thousands of people cycle in and out of jails, including many who are detained prior to adjudication and conviction, and many have become ill. A recent [analysis](#) published in *JAMA* found that, from March 31st through June 6th, COVID-19 cases in U.S. federal and state prisons were 5.5 times higher—and death rates three times higher—than in the general population.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has underscored the close relationship between the health of people in prisons and jails, and the health of families and communities. A recent [Health Affairs research article](#) found that people cycling through Cook County Jail was associated with 15.7 percent of all documented COVID-19 cases in Illinois and 15.9 percent of all documented cases in Chicago. Public health experts have acknowledged that COVID-19 clusters place communities at greater risk for higher rates of transmission and death. Currently all of the country's [fourteen largest known clusters of COVID-19 cases](#) are correctional facilities.

Allowing for Medicaid coverage just prior to release would lead to reduced use of emergency departments, hospitalizations, and other medical expenses connected to health care needs upon reentry and result in health care cost savings. As we face a pandemic of infectious disease, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* would not only improve the health of reentering individuals but also would protect the health of the community.

The *Medicaid Reentry Act* also would promote greater racial justice and equity in access to health care. Due to systemic racism, Black and Brown people face disparities in health care coverage and access. As a result, they experience poorer health outcomes, including higher rates of COVID-19 infection and mortality. Untreated mental health and substance use

disorders, coupled with racism in the criminal justice system, have driven the overrepresentation of Black and Brown people in jails and prisons. Strengthening people's access to quality community-based health care upon reentry would foster racial justice and equity by improving Black and Brown people's health outcomes and reducing rates of re-involvement with the criminal justice system.

Finally, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* would continue Congress's important bipartisan work to reduce mortality as a result of increasing numbers of drug overdoses and suicides, especially since the onset of COVID-19. People with mental health and substance use disorders who are reentering the community from incarceration are particularly vulnerable; in the first two weeks of reentry, people are 129 percent more likely to die from a drug overdose and are at significantly higher risk to die by suicide. In this time of heightened stress, isolation, and hardship, rates of mental health and substance use disorder-related crises are increasing. As people transition from incarceration to the community, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* would reduce care disruptions and provide a warm handoff to community-based mental health and substance use disorder services, medications, and supports. More effectively addressing mental health and substance use disorder care needs immediately before and during reentry would also reduce recidivism.

As Congress crafts legislation to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, passage of the *Medicaid Reentry Act* is a crucial step to improving the health of individuals reentering the community from incarceration and promoting the community's public health and safety. We urge you to take action to ensure that the Medicaid Reentry Act is included in the next response package. Thank you for your attention to these important issues; please contact Gabrielle de la Guéronnière (gdelagueronniere@lac-dc.org) with any questions.

National Organizations:

Addiction Policy Forum
AIDS United
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
American Academy of HIV Medicine
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence
American Association on Health and Disability
American Federation of Teachers
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
The Ammon Foundation
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Balonick & Associates
C4 Recovery Solutions INC.
Campaign for Youth Justice
The Carter Center Mental Health Program
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Child Welfare League of America
Community Access National Network

Community Catalyst
Community Oriented Correctional Health Services
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Drug Policy Alliance
Faces & Voices of Recovery
From Prison Cells to PhD
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Health in Justice Action Lab, Northeastern University
Hep B United
Hepatitis B Foundation
Hepatitis C Association
Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group-HCMSG
HIV Medicine Association
Hondurans Against AIDS
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Inseparable
International Community Corrections Association
Justice Optimization Technical Associates
The Kennedy Forum
Lakeshore Foundation
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Legal Action Center
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
NACBHDD (National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors)
NARMH (National Association for Rural Mental Health)
NASTAD
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Alliance for Medication Assisted (NAMA) Recovery
National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children of Addiction
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Commission on Correctional Health Care
National Criminal Justice Association
National Crittenton
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National HIRE Network
National Juvenile Justice Network
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable
National Youth Employment Coalition
A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)
Opioid Crisis Response Fund
Police, Treatment, and, Community Collaborative (PTACC)
Positive Women's Network-USA
Ryan White Medical Providers Coalition
Safer Foundation

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDAA)
Shatterproof
SMART Recovery
Southern AIDS Coalition
StopStigmaNow
Treatment Action Group
Treatment Advocacy Center
Treatment Communities of America
Trust for America's Health
Well Being Trust
The Well Project
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Local and State Organizations:

AIDS Foundation Chicago
Any Positive Change Inc. (California)
APLA Health (California)
Aquila Recovery Clinic LLC (Washington, DC)
Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare (Oregon)
Central City Concern (Oregon)
CODA, Inc (Oregon)
Desert AIDS Project (California)
Equality North Carolina
Equality Ohio
A Family Affair Living Our Best Life (South Carolina)
Friends of Guest House (Virginia)
Georgians for a Healthy Future
Harm Reduction Sisters (Minnesota)
Interfaith Action for Human Rights (Washington, DC)
Live4Lali (Illinois)
Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association
Mommieactivist and Sons (Washington, DC)
Motherhood Beyond Bars (Georgia)
New Jersey Citizen Action
New York Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers
North Carolina AIDS Action Network
Oregon Council for Behavioral Health
Positive People Network, Inc (Florida)
Reproductive Justice Inside (Maryland)
Salvation and Social Justice (New Jersey)
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Sonoran Prevention Works (Arizona)
Suncoast Harm Reduction Project
TASC, Inc. (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities) (Illinois)
University of Maryland School of Medicine
Utah Health Policy Project
VOCAL-NY
Voices for a Second Chance (Washington, DC)
Women on the Rise GA
WV FREE