

Representative Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Michael Turner
U.S. House of Representatives
2082 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Tonko and Turner:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) strongly supports your bill H.R. 1329, the Medicaid Reentry Act, to grant Medicaid eligibility to incarcerated individuals 30-days prior to their release. We are pleased to see that this bill mirrors language from the bill introduced in the last Congress. While we appreciate the provisions in last year's SUPPORT Act to convene a stakeholder group to develop best practices for ensuring healthcare coverage for adult incarcerated individuals transitioning from incarceration, we remain supportive of the original language contained within H.R. 1329 to promote the health care needs of individuals transitioning back into communities.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than half of those in the criminal justice system suffer from a mental illness. Of those with serious mental illness, approximately 75 percent also have a co-occurring substance use disorder. Amidst the nation's ongoing opioid and suicide crises, we commend your efforts to provide better health outcomes for previously incarcerated individuals. As you know, individuals reentering society after incarceration are 129 times more likely than the general population to die of a drug overdose during the first two weeks post-release. Allowing incarcerated individuals to receive services covered by Medicaid 30-days prior to their release from jail or prison will expand access to vital mental health and addiction services, thereby preventing recidivism for substance use disorder and improving the chances of better health and well-being possibilities for previously incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, by investing in prevention, your legislation will save healthcare and criminal justice systemic costs, as well as facilitate a more effective use of community resources.

Successful reentry requires enabling justice-involved individuals to avoid returning to the exact environmental factors that led to their incarceration in the first place. By equipping individuals with timely access to addiction, mental health, and other health-related services before release, your legislation facilitates the transition to community-based care upon release that is necessary to help break the cycle of recidivism. Providing a head start to Medicaid reinstatement would work in tandem with innovative reentry programs already implemented in local support networks across the country and will contribute to fostering healthier, drug-free lives for formerly incarcerated populations.

On behalf of the assigned groups below, we would like to thank you for your re-introduction of the Medicaid Reentry Act, and we offer ourselves as a resource in furthering your efforts to pass this life-changing legislation in the 116th Congress.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Cities Thrive Mental Health Coalition
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
EMDR International Association
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
The Kennedy Forum
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Eating Disorders Association
NHMH - No Health Without Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Psychotherapy Action Network
Schizophrenia And Related Disorders Alliance of America
School Social Work Association of America
Treatment Communities of America
Trinity Health
Trust for America's Health