



The Honorable Christopher Murphy
United States Senate
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

May 6, 2014

Dear Senator Murphy,

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, to thank you for your leadership on introducing the At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act (S. 2211).

As an organization committed to securing a bright future for formerly incarcerated youth, we applaud efforts to ensure that program eligibility for youth enrolled in a Medicaid program prior to incarceration is not terminated upon entering a residential facility, and these teens do not lose access to the health care coverage they need to find their place in society and reduce their chance of recidivism.

According to the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, as of 2011, 61,423 juvenile offenders were held in juvenile residential facilities. If a youth is enrolled in Medicaid prior to incarceration, their enrollment in the program should only be suspended, rather than terminated, during their incarceration. However, youth are finding their eligibility from Medicaid terminated once they are released, despite the fact that in many cases, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) are asking the state Medicaid programs to only temporarily suspend, rather than terminate, enrollment while a youth is incarcerated. When Medicaid enrollment is terminated, it may take as long as 90 days to be reinstated in the program.

This legislation would ensure that incarcerated youth are simply suspended, rather than terminated, from Medicaid while they are incarcerated. It would require states to automatically restore full eligibility to youth upon release from incarceration, and to take any steps necessary to make sure that youth begin receiving medical assistance benefits immediately. The only exception is if the state determines that the youth is no longer eligible for Medicaid under Federal or State eligibility requirements.

Enrollment in Medicaid is particularly important for many of these youth. Seventy percent of youth in the juvenile system show signs of a mental disorder and have a higher than average rate of substance abuse, yet they lack the health coverage for proper treatment. In order to prevent recidivism for these youth, we need to ensure that those who are eligible for Medicaid are enrolled upon being released from incarceration.

We are grateful for your leadership in introducing this legislation and we welcome the opportunity to work with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley
President