



28 April 2016

The Honorable Chris Murphy  
136 Hart Senate Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cory Booker  
359 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Murphy and Booker:

On behalf of the 122,500 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing in support of the *At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act*. This critically important legislation would ensure the timely reinstatement of Medicaid benefits to justice-involved youth upon their release from public institutions.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprising researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, profession, and means of promoting health, education, and human welfare. Our members work every day to improve the lives of the most vulnerable members of American society.

Youth detained in the juvenile justice system experience mental and behavioral health disorders at rates far exceeding that of their peers in the community. One extensive review found these rates to be four to twenty times higher, depending on the diagnosis.<sup>1</sup> For far too many of these young people, involvement in the justice system represents the first time they receive needed mental and behavioral health assessment and treatment, which justice systems must provide. However, a glitch in the way some states administer Medicaid threatens to disrupt services for these youth.

Due to restrictions on the use of Medicaid funds to provide care to inmates of public institutions, certain states terminate, rather than suspend, Medicaid benefits for these individuals. Because of this, justice-involved youth suffering from depression, anxiety, symptoms of traumatic stress, substance abuse, and other mental and behavioral health needs too often face a gap in treatment when reentering their communities. Even small delays in the reinstatement of Medicaid benefits can interfere with needed access to effective psychosocial and pharmacological interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> Fazel, S., Doll, H., & Långström, N. (2008). Mental disorders among adolescents in juvenile detention and correctional facilities: A systematic review and metaregression analysis of 25 surveys. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 47, 1010-1019. doi:10.1097/CHI.ObO13e31817eefc3

Your legislation aims to ensure continuity of physical, mental, and behavioral health services for justice-involved youth, by ensuring that states suspend—never terminate—their Medicaid benefits, and APA is grateful for your commitment to ensuring that these youth are not further penalized upon reentry to their communities.

Thank you for introducing this critical legislation. If we can provide any additional information or be of support in your efforts, please contact Micah Haskell-Hoehl at [mhaskell-hoehl@apa.org](mailto:mhaskell-hoehl@apa.org) or 202.336.5935. We look forward to working with you to advance this important priority on behalf of justice-involved youth and their families and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Keita". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and a stylized "Keita".

Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Public Interest Directorate