

April 7, 2022

The Honorable John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
425 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Cornyn and Klobuchar:

Our diverse organizations represent law enforcement officers, judges, court personnel, corrections officers and leaders, policymakers, faith-based leaders, mental health professionals, people with mental illness and their families, suicide prevention advocates, and veterans service providers. We come together to urge the passage of the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Reauthorization Act of 2022 which would reauthorize the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCP). This bipartisan bill is vitally important to the criminal justice and mental health fields.

Each year, there are an estimated two million people with serious mental illnesses admitted to jails across the nation. That's equivalent to the entire population of either West Virginia, New Mexico, or Nebraska. About three-quarters of these adults also struggle with substance use. Once incarcerated, individuals with mental illnesses tend to stay longer in jail, and upon release are at a higher risk of reincarceration than those without these illnesses. Moreover, the need for mental health services has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With decreasing mental health supports and services, an increasing number of people with mental illnesses are coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The impact of this trend on people's lives, public safety, the administration of the criminal justice system, and public expenditures is overwhelming. Law enforcement officers are too often called upon to serve as our first (and frequently only) responders to address socioeconomic and health needs, including mental health and suicidal crises, substance use, and homelessness. Increasing numbers of people with mental illnesses are coming into contact with the criminal justice system, which has stressed law enforcement's ability to meet the needs of those in crisis.

We strongly support the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program— authorized under the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA)— because it ensures our criminal justice and mental health systems have the funding and technical assistance they need to serve some of our nation's most vulnerable individuals. State and local governments can use the grants for a broad range of activities, including: mental health courts, specialized first response options for people in crisis, in-facility treatment for mental illnesses and substance use, and interventions for youth who are involved or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system. The program was signed into law in 2004 and reauthorized with bipartisan support in 2008 and 2016.

For people with mental illnesses, who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, JMHCP promotes public safety and community health by facilitating collaboration among the criminal justice, juvenile justice, mental health treatment, and substance use treatment systems to ensure those with mental illnesses receive the services and help they need.

The Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Reauthorization Act of 2022 reauthorizes JMHCP for the next five years at \$50 million annually. It also makes important improvements to the program, including:

- Strengthening support for mental health courts and crisis intervention teams;
- Supporting diversion programming and training for state and local prosecutors;

- Strengthening support for co-responder teams;
- Supporting the integration of 988 into the existing public safety system;
- Amending allowable uses to include suicide prevention in jails and information sharing between mental health systems and jails/prisons;
- Amending allowable uses to include case management services and supports;
- Clarifying that crisis intervention teams can be placed in 911 call centers.

Using JMHCP funding, jurisdictions across the country have been able to launch and expand innovative programs that support public safety while connecting people to needed community-based treatment and supports. The Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Reauthorization Act of 2022 will ensure that state and local governments can continue to design and implement sound initiatives that improve our responses to individuals with mental illness who come in contact with the criminal justice system.

Sincerely,

Addiction Policy Forum
 American Jail Association
 American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
 American Probation and Parole Association
 Correctional Leaders Association
 Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA)
 Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA)
 Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery
 National Association of Counties (NACo)
 National Association of Drug Court Professionals
 National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
 National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO)
 National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)
 National Conference of State Legislatures
 National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA)
 National District Attorneys Association (NDAA)
 National League of Cities
 National Sheriffs' Association (NSA)
 The Council of State Governments Justice Center
 Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC)