



February 27, 2024

The Honorable Cory Booker
Chairman
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice &
Counterterrorism
Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cotton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice &
Counterterrorism
Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Booker and Ranking Member Cotton:

We write to you on behalf of the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA), which represents the largest Sheriff's Offices in the country and over 130 million citizens who they serve in their jurisdictions. We appreciate the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Criminal Justice & Counterterrorism will hold a hearing on: "The Nation's Correctional Staffing Crisis: Assessing the Toll on Correctional Officers and Incarcerated Persons."

We encourage you to consider the following priority areas as you review efforts to recruit and retain qualified officers who can provide the necessary support to those who come into contact with the criminal justice system:

Recruitment & Retention

MCSA encourages Congress to prioritize legislation to support recruitment and retention of law enforcement in all areas, including patrol, corrections, investigations, and emergency communications. These proposals should incentivize individuals of all backgrounds to apply for job opportunities through new offerings, such as daycare, educational opportunities, and flexible scheduling.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for experienced individuals to address complex criminogenic, chronic care, and behavioral health needs of inmates. Support for the recruitment and retention of reentry navigators, recovery coaches, and mental health clinicians working in law enforcement agencies would be a meaningful contribution to the field.

Officer Wellness

Our personnel must be supported with high quality programming and tools to help them cope with the extreme stresses placed on them in the normal course of their jobs. Lawmakers should provide resources for effective officer safety and wellness, including mental health services and peer counseling among law enforcement to train officers to help their colleagues with stressful situations.

Congress should prioritize correctional officer wellness as they face stressors unique to their working environment. We encourage lawmakers to improve data collection and analysis of correctional officer suicide and burnout and to review national guidelines for the treatment of correctional officer burnout.

Training

Congress should provide resources for law enforcement agencies to provide high quality scenario-based training to enhance officers' ability to safely interact with the individuals they serve.

Mental Health/Substance Use Treatment

Increasing numbers of people suffering with mental illness and substance use disorders are coming into contact with the criminal justice system, which has stressed our ability to meet the needs of those in crisis. Additional resources are necessary to provide effective treatment for these individuals.

We encourage Congress to quickly take up and pass the *Supporting Treatment and Recovery Over Narcotics for Growth, Empowerment, and Rehabilitation Act*, which will reauthorize the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment for State Prisoners (RSAT) state formula grant program to support states and local governments in offering treatment to adults in prison and jail with a substance use disorder. The legislation includes important updates to the program, including allowing grantees to use RSAT funds to offer treatment to individuals pre-trial, ensuring continuity of care and access to medication assisted treatment after release, and assisting prisons and jails meet contemporary standards of medical care for substance use disorders.

MCSA also supports improvements in community behavioral health resources, especially those directed at greater upstream prevention that can divert individuals away from the criminal justice system and into treatment. Furthermore, MCSA supports the delivery of high-quality healthcare and treatment for those mentally ill and/or substance-addicted inmates who must remain incarcerated due to the severity of the crimes of which they have been charged or convicted.

Access to Federal Health Benefits

MCSA urges Congress to pass legislation to amend the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP) to improve care coordination and provide continued access to federal health benefits for eligible individuals in local jails.

The *Due Process Continuity of Care Act* would allow pre-trial detainees to receive Medicaid benefits at the option of the state and provide planning grant dollars to states for implementation. The *Reentry Act* would allow for Medicaid payment for medical services furnished to incarcerated individuals during the 30-day period preceding an individual's release.

Passage of this legislation would allow for improved care, lower costs to taxpayers, decreased crime, reduced recidivism, improved public safety, and better outcomes for the overall health of our residents.

Reentry

MCSA supports *Second Chance Act* programs, which promote evidence-based practices, specifically targeting reentry programs to aid individuals with more effectively reintegrating into society and reducing the potential of return to the criminal justice system in the future. Part of this process is ensuring that adequate substance use disorder treatment services and career training for employment opportunities are available as part of the continuum of care post-release for incarcerated individuals.

MCSA stands ready to provide technical feedback on proposals to reauthorize the *Second Chance Act*.

We appreciate the Senate Judiciary's Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism focusing on this important issue and we look forward to continuing to serve as a resource. Should you need any further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Sheriff Bill Brown
Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office
MCSA President



Megan E. Noland
Executive Director
Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA)