



September 22, 2016

The Honorable Tony Cárdenas  
United States House of Representatives  
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**Subject: Support for the "At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act of 2016"**

Dear Representative Cárdenas:

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and America's 3,069 counties, the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD) and our 750 county behavioral health authorities and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the more than 2,800 local public health departments nationwide, we write to express our support for the At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act of 2016 (H.R. 5100).

Counties nationwide spend \$176 billion annually on justice and health systems, including the entire cost of medical care for all arrested and detained individuals. Counties are required by federal law to provide healthcare for the 11.4 million individuals who pass through 3,000 local jails each year with an average length of stay of 23 days. Roughly two thirds of those detained in jails at any given time are pre-trial and presumed innocent. Each year, over 54,000 juvenile offenders pass through the juvenile justice system, 60 percent of whom are housed in detention centers or long-term secure settings.

Currently only 16 states and the District of Columbia follow recommendations by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to suspend Medicaid for the duration of incarceration. When Medicaid is terminated, former inmates must submit a new application for Medicaid enrollment and it can take months for benefits to be restored. Roughly 70 percent of youths in the juvenile justice system suffer from mental illness, and such disruptions in care significantly increase the risk of recidivism, re-incarceration and mortality post-release.

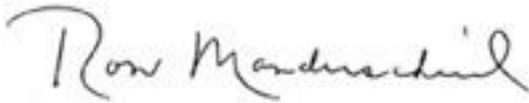
By preventing states from arbitrarily terminating Medicaid enrollment for justice-involved youth, H.R. 5100 would allow for more timely provision of health care services upon release from a public institution. Swift reinstatement of health care benefits upon release provides for more effective re-entry into the community and promotes continuity of care for young people with substance abuse disorders and other chronic health conditions.

We thank you for your continued leadership in working to improve the health outcomes of justice-involved individuals, especially our youth. We stand ready to work with you in support of healthy, vibrant and safe communities.

Sincerely,



Matt D. Chase  
Executive Director  
National Association of Counties



Ron Manderscheid, PhD  
Executive Director  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors



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