



Working to Reduce Poverty in America

June 26, 2023

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo:

On behalf of Catholic Charities USA and its 167-member agencies, which operate in over 3,000 service locations across 50 states, Washington D.C., and the U.S. territories, I write in support of the Reentry Act (S. 1165). The Reentry Act will assist justice-impacted individuals in their effective reintegration into society while promoting healthcare equity and potentially reducing healthcare costs. By facilitating successful reentry, this bill strengthens communities, reduces recidivism rates, and promotes public safety, ultimately benefiting the common good.

The Catholic Charities ministry is grounded in the fundamental Gospel principle that every person is created in the image of God, possessing inherent worth and dignity. Through our services, we demonstrate God's love for all and honor our duty to help those in need. A part of our ministry is assisting those affected by the criminal justice system and providing companionship to them during difficult moments of affliction and isolation. The Reentry Act would remove obstacles to medical assistance for returning citizens and ensure that all people, regardless of their past, have equitable access to essential healthcare.

The bill also addresses the difficulties former inmates face after incarceration in accessing medical care due to poverty and their criminal records. The Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy does not allow federal funding for incarcerated individuals in public institutions unless they are in a medical facility. Unfortunately, many individuals currently incarcerated or being released from incarceration, face many health concerns, including chronic mental and behavioral disease and substance abuse. The Reentry Act aims to address this problem by expanding medical assistance to inmates 30 days before their release. Early interventions and continuity of care for this vulnerable group can enhance their overall health outcomes and lessen the need for costly emergency interventions. This, in turn, can alleviate the burden on emergency rooms, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities, leading to reduced healthcare costs for taxpayers.

This legislation also addresses the significant disparities in healthcare access, specifically among Black individuals who are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. By reducing barriers to medical assistance, this bill acknowledges and seeks to rectify these disparities for this vulnerable population.

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Successfully reintegrating individuals into society is essential for reducing recidivism rates and building stronger, healthier communities. The Reentry Act recognizes this important objective and aims to equip returning citizens with the necessary tools and support systems for a successful transition.

I urge strong bipartisan support in passing the Reentry Act. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you to ensure our nation's communities are safe and serving the best interests of vulnerable people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sister Donna Markham, OP." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD
President and CEO
Catholic Charities USA