

Conference of Chief Justices Conference of State Court Administrators

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April 29, 2025

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA), we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep concern about the termination of numerous Department of Justice grants that support adult and juvenile drug courts, support law enforcement, and provide crisis services for individuals with mental illnesses.

Such cuts will have a direct impact on life saving and financially responsible initiatives, including treatment courts, the Byrne JAG program, Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP), and the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCP). Terminating these programs will not end the problems they were designed to address. Mental health and substance abuse know no borders. These terminations will merely turn back the clock to a time when local law enforcement, courts, jails and prisons were our nation's de facto mental health and substance abuse treatment systems without the resources to meet the needs of people and the communities we all serve. State courts are overwhelmingly the primary place that refers people into treatment.

But there is more. The impact of these program terminations in drug court funding and assistance goes beyond state courts. In several states, federal and state courts have partnered with the latter taking on the lion's share of supervisory and treatment responsibility for federal offenders. These programs – a stellar example of cooperative federalism that should be promoted – are designed to enable federal courts to take advantage of the state courts' 40 plus years of experience, effectively assisting the federal government in reducing *its* criminal defendant supervision, treatment, and incarceration needs. These partnerships are now effectively terminated.

The CCJ and the COSCA are comprised of the highest judicial officers and highest court executive officers of each state, the U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia, respectively. As such, our members are responsible for administering the court systems of this country that handle almost 97% of the cases filed annually with the courts – some 67,500,000 cases in 2023. But a raw number tells only a small part of the story given the types of cases on our dockets. We are truly the nation’s general jurisdiction courts. State courts handle all domestic relations cases, child neglect and abuse cases, elder abuse cases, and guardianship for disabled children and adults. We handle juvenile delinquency, even many involving youth who violate federal law. We handle the vast majority of criminal cases filed in this country, some 16.2 million cases in 2023. From mental health to substance use disorder to families in distress to the elderly to crime and so on, there is no major legal or social issue in this country that we do not experience everyday in the work of the state courts.

The breadth and depth of the work of the state courts require us to be innovative and responsive to the needs of the people we serve. Drug courts, for example, began in the state courts in response to the need to find a better way to address crime caused by substance use disorders. That “problem solving” approach has now expanded to embrace other generators of crime or to address certain population groups with unique needs such as those with serious mental illness and our veterans. But with these terminations those programs are now in jeopardy across the nation.

Programming terminations of greatest concern include:

- **Adult and Juvenile Drug Courts.** These specialized court programs provide treatment and accountability resources for criminal defendants who have been convicted of a drug offense and parents with pending child welfare cases who have alcohol and other drug dependency problems. Such problems can often lead to abuse and neglect charges and placement of children into long-term foster care. The comprehensive drug court model includes screening and assessment of risks, needs, and responsivity; judicial oversight; monitoring (e.g., drug testing) and supervision; graduated sanctions and incentives; and evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation services. Technical assistance and training for drug court grantees, as authorized by Congress, is a critical component of drug court programs. *Grant terminations:* 15PBJA-23-GK-02440-DGCT, 15PNIJ-24-GG-02869-NIJB, 2018-R2-CX-0029
- **Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) Program.** This program is the cornerstone of federal funding in support of state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and courts. It is one of the leading formula-driven grant programs for crime reduction across the nation with money directed to local grant recipients and states. Byrne JAG funding directly aligns with the Administration’s priorities as its main purposes are to combat violent crime through support for law enforcement task forces, including drug and human trafficking task forces; to better coordinate law enforcement efforts at all levels of government; provide resources to courts, and to provide support for victims of crime. Byrne JAG Technical Assistance and Training (TTA) provides tools and support to state and local law courts and agencies in strategic planning, grants administration,

best practices, data management, and peer learning, all with the goal of reducing crime across the nation. Strategic planning is a statutory requirement of Byrne JAG. This program provides a significant return on investment for communities by supporting local authorities through best practices and planning services to ensure the most impactful use of funding and protect the American people from crime. The statute requires the Department of Justice to “provide technical assistance to States and local governments...to develop and implement” their strategic plans through a technical assistance and training provider. *Grant terminations:* #2019-YA-BX-K002 and #15PBJA-22-GK-01566-JAGJ

- **Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (Byrne SCIP).** This program provides formula funds to State Administering Agencies (SAAs) and local public safety agencies to implement programs that support the reduction of violent crime, promote suicide prevention and crisis response, and address the needs of those at risk for committing violent crimes due to mental illness. This funding, among other things, supports veteran and law enforcement suicide prevention and mental health services, and protects American children through support for youth suicide prevention and school safety. This new formula grant requires states to go through several planning stages prior to the release of funds to courts and local and state public safety agencies. Byrne JAG TTA supports states in efficiently and effectively managing programs to comply with federal rules and regulations. TTA also supports states and the Department of Justice in data collection efforts to evaluate funded services to determine the efficacy of programs. TTA services provide a significant return on investment by supporting the states’ best use of funds and assisting them in evaluating their dollars for future decisions. *Grant terminations:* #15PBJA-22-GK-04999-BSCI
- **Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program.** This program supports initiatives for people with mental illnesses and co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders involved in the justice system. For nearly 20 years, JMHCP grantees have helped promote public safety and save public resources by safely diverting people from the criminal justice system into treatment and comprehensive support services. The programs funded by JMHCP include training for law enforcement, courts, and other public safety officials while fostering collaboration between justice and treatment system professionals. Ultimately, through these efforts, many communities have been able to reduce state and local costs while improving outcomes for the people affected by mental illnesses and substance use disorders. JMHCP has supported mental health courts, other court-based initiatives, local police departments, and other programs to improve outcomes for people with mental illness and co-occurring substance use conditions. Technical assistance and training for JMHCP grantees is authorized by Congress as a critical component of the program. *Grant terminations:* 15PBJA-24-GK-03810-MUMU, 15PBJA-22-GK-03573-MENT, 15PBJA-22-GK-03568-MENT, 15PBJA-23-GG-02201-MENT, 15PBJA-23-GG-01463-MENT

These long-standing, bipartisan, congressionally supported programs invest in public safety, court resources, and behavioral health. They provide state judges and local officials with the opportunity to increase community safety. They provide alternatives to using jails and prisons as

substitutes for behavioral health care. They save taxpayers money. They reduce crime and its victimization. Terminating these programs will not end the problems they were designed to address. Again, it will shift the burden to local law enforcement, courts, jails and prisons as this nation's de facto mental health and substance abuse treatment systems.

Congress's ongoing commitment to ensuring the continuation of congressionally mandated programs designed to promote public safety is vital to our communities. We thank every member of Congress for their commitment to making communities safer. We ask you to act urgently to work with your colleagues in Congress and with the Administration to restart funding for treatment courts, Byrne JAG, Byrne SCIP, and JMHCP.

Sincerely,



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