



**Justice Center**  
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

April 25, 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 Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, we write to express our deep concerns and strong opposition to the immediate termination of critical Department of Justice and the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) programs that focus on improving public safety, reducing recidivism, addressing untreated addiction and mental health conditions, and strengthening communities. Immediately halting such efforts will have a direct impact on initiatives that assist criminal justice leaders in every state, including the Second Chance Act programs, the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCP), and the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI). Terminating these congressionally authorized programs would reverse progress that has been made and prevent states and communities from providing crucial, life-saving services. These actions not only undermine evidence-based public safety programs, but they also severely hinder the ability of practitioners—including policymakers, law enforcement, correctional staff, probation and parole officers, behavioral health clinicians, and court staff—from accessing critical tools, training, and technical assistance necessary to do their jobs effectively.

The CSG Justice Center is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, serving state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities. Leaders of local law enforcement, jails, and courts rely on us for information and advice about best practices being adopted across the country. We recognize that successful criminal justice policy requires substantial collaboration between state and local governments, and we work to foster such partnerships. The Advisory Board includes state legislators from both political parties, judicial leaders, health and human service agency administrators, victim advocates, corrections administrators, juvenile justice professionals, law enforcement officials, and people who have experienced the criminal justice system firsthand. Together, our Advisory Board represents a cross-section of leaders who shape criminal justice policy in various parts of the country.



To promote public safety, law enforcement must use current data to inform and invest in proven strategies to reduce crime. Law enforcement cannot adequately and efficiently address crime and improve public safety without having adequate resources to monitor and track occurrences. Using data in tandem with best practices programs aimed at reducing community violence makes communities safer.

Ninety-five percent of people in jails and prisons will return to their communities, representing nearly 1.8 million people annually in the United States. When individuals return to their families and communities, they face complex challenges, such as education, employment, substance use, mental illness, housing, and homelessness. Without access to these critical services, it would increase the risk of recidivism. Investing in reentry programs reduces the likelihood of repeat offenses, harmful crime in communities, and the use of law enforcement resources. Additionally, with the responsibility of responding to and treating people with substance use disorders and mental illness often falling on an already strained criminal justice system, it is clear that we need to redirect resources from containment to more effective strategies and treatment.

Over the past several decades, funding for the Second Chance Act programs, JMHCP, and JRI have had wide bipartisan support, including President Trump signing the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act into law in 2018.

These grants provide crucial resources at a time when they are desperately needed. Below are examples of how these time-tested, proven programs promote public safety, reduce recidivism, and build stronger communities:

- Congress passed the bipartisan **Second Chance Act** in 2008 to reduce recidivism rates and address the reentry needs of individuals returning to our communities each year from jail and prison. These programs provide a range of services, including employment assistance, treatment for substance use disorders and mental illnesses, housing services, family-centered programming and mentoring, and other evidence-based reentry programs. To date, the Second Chance Act has served over 442,000 people<sup>1</sup> through more than 1,300 grants to state, Tribal, and local agencies and community-based organizations across U.S. states and territories.<sup>2</sup> Three-year reincarceration rates have decreased 23 percent nationally since the Second Chance Act was passed in 2008.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Second Chance Act grants have helped address the unique challenges of the continued substance use disorder and overdose crisis. Second Chance Act programs are urgently needed to provide communities with access to life-saving substance use disorder treatment services for the growing number of people with behavioral health needs in prisons and jails. Research shows that an

<sup>1</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Second Chance Act Reentry Performance Reports* (2011–2020), <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/funding/grant-performance-measurement/performance-data-reports#10-0>.

<sup>2</sup> CSG Justice Center, “Congressional Briefing on The Second Chance Act: Advancing Successful Reentry and Public Safety,” April 25, 2023, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gaq6rejYFCw>.

<sup>3</sup> CSG Justice Center, *50 States, 1 Goal: Examining State-Level Recidivism Trends in the Second Chance Act Era* (New York: CSG Justice Center, 2024), <https://csjusticecenter.org/publications/50-states-1-goal/>.



estimated 65 percent of the United States prison population has an active substance use disorder,<sup>4</sup> and people released from prison are up to 129 times more likely to overdose within the first 2 weeks of release compared to the general population.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Second Chance Act programs help participants access jobs and housing, allowing people to contribute positively to their community. From 2009 to 2023, more than 60 percent of all participants enrolled in employment, housing, or education services through SCA-funded programs gained employment, obtained housing, or received vocational certificates or degrees, respectively.<sup>6</sup> By providing the resources needed to coordinate reentry services and policies, the Second Chance Act ensures that the tax dollars spent on corrections no longer support a revolving door in and out of prison and jail.

- **Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program** supports initiatives for people with mental illnesses and co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders who interact with 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. These programs also provide training for law enforcement and other public safety officials while fostering collaboration between justice and treatment professionals. Ultimately, through these efforts, many communities have been able to reduce state and local costs on public safety while improving outcomes for the people affected by mental illnesses and substance use disorders. To date, JMHCP appropriations have funded 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 who come into contact with the justice system. JMHCP has funded more than 795 grants across 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Guam, and American Samoa.
- The **Justice Reinvestment Initiative** helps states harness the power of data to confront these urgent challenges head-on. By analyzing trends in violent crime, substance use, and mental health disorders, as well as persistent recidivism, the initiative empowers states to implement evidence-based policies, invest in what works, and allocate resources effectively—ultimately reducing crime, addressing behavioral health needs, and enhancing public safety for all. Savings generated through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative process are reinvested in areas such as services for victims of crime; crisis intervention team training for local law enforcement; community-based treatment and reentry programs; and the most cost-effective, research-based strategies available for increasing public safety and strengthening communities. Forty-four states have deployed a Justice Reinvestment approach to develop policies to reduce crime and recidivism and improve responses and

<sup>4</sup> “Criminal Justice DrugFacts,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/criminal-justice#ref>.

<sup>5</sup> I.A. Binswanger et al., “Return to drug use and overdose after release from prison: a qualitative study of risk and protective factors,” *Addiction Science & Clinical Practice* 7, no. 1 (2012): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1940-0640-7-3>.

<sup>6</sup> “Incarceration & Reentry,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed February 17, 2025, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/human-services/incarceration-reentry-0>.



treatment for people with addiction and mental illness. States that have used the Justice Reinvestment Initiative have seen an overall reduction of their crime rates of 38 percent on average between 2008 and 2023 and reduced their recidivism rates by 10 percent on average between 2008 and 2019.

These bipartisan, congressionally supported programs that invest in the outcome of individuals returning to their community and public safety and comprehensive public health and crime data provide the country with the opportunity to address overcrowding in our correctional facilities, increase community safety, and to stop using jails and prisons as substitutes for a properly functioning mental health system. The relatively small Congressional investments pay significant dividends for Americans, law enforcement, and public safety.

Congress's ongoing commitment to its power of the purse to promote public safety is vital to Americans' welfare. We thank every member of Congress for their commitment to making communities safer and providing people with opportunities to contribute to their communities. But no day is more challenging than the critical resources our state and local justice leaders need to reduce violent crime, recidivism, and inefficiencies are immediately terminated. We ask you to act urgently to work with your colleagues in Congress and with the Administration to restart funding and work for the Second Chance Act programs, JMHCP, and JRI.

Sincerely,

The Council of State Governments Justice Center Advisory Board

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cam Ward".

Cam Ward  
Chair  
Director, Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter J. Katoujian".

Peter J. Katoujian  
Vice-Chair  
Sheriff, Middlesex County, Massachusetts