

February 2, 2024

The Honorable John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
530 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Cornyn and Whitehouse:

We write to urge passage of the *Supporting Treatment and Recovery Over Narcotics for Growth, Empowerment, and Rehabilitation Act (STRONGER Act)*. The need for substance use disorder treatment during incarceration is great. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that up to 65 percent of individuals in prison have a diagnosed substance use disorderⁱ, with an additional 20 percent under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of arrest. Further, it is estimated that 15 percent of those in jails have an opioid use disorderⁱⁱ.

We have a crisis of addiction in this country that was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over 100,000 Americans died of an overdose during the 12-month period ending in April 2021. This was a heartbreaking increase of 28.5 percent, from the over 78,000 drug overdose deaths during the same period the year before.ⁱⁱⁱ Overdose deaths accelerated sharply during the pandemic, to almost 110,000 by December 2022^{iv}. This tragic trend continues as more than 100,000 people died from a drug overdose in the past year.^v

We strongly support the Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment (RSAT) program because it provides funding and training and technical assistance for states and local governments to develop and implement critical substance use disorder treatment programs in state, local, and tribal correctional and detention facilities and to create and maintain community reintegration services for individuals upon release to the community.

The *Supporting Treatment and Recovery Over Narcotics for Growth, Empowerment, and Rehabilitation Act (STRONGER Act)* reauthorizes the program for the next five years at \$40 million annually and makes important improvements to the program, including to:

- authorize treatment programs to enroll pretrial detainees, a tool previously unavailable for stopping the cycle of incarceration;
- strengthen the requirement that all treatment services adhere to established clinical standards;
- build capacity, where available and appropriate, including assisting prisons and jails to meet contemporary standards of medical care for substance use disorders; and,
- require the appropriate medical personnel in a prison or jail that receives RSAT grant funds to complete training on clinical issues related to the treatment of addiction in a carceral setting, including the use of medications and behavioral interventions for treatment of substance use disorders and planning for the seamless transition of treatment to the community upon release. This funding can be paid for using grant funds. The bill does not include any unfunded mandates for training or otherwise. *This training promises to have an outsized impact in communities as the knowledge gained will benefit the facility's entire clinical program.*

Aside from helping to break the cycle of addiction, the Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment Program reduces costs to states and localities by reducing recidivism and the expense of drug-related crimes and associated incarceration costs. In this way, it keeps communities safer.

As illustrated by the signatures below, this bill is supported by a broad and dedicated coalition of national and local organizations on the front lines of the criminal justice and behavioral health systems. Like you, we know the terrible toll of addiction in our communities and the unmet need for treatment in our nation's prisons and jails. We thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your efforts to ensure that the Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment program is continued and strengthened.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Addiction Policy Forum
All Rise
American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence
American Correctional Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Jail Association
American Probation and Parole Association
American Psychological Association
Association of Prosecuting Attorneys
Association of State Criminal Investigative Agencies
Behavioral Health Foundation
Civil Citation Deflection and Diversion Network
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
Community Oriented Correctional Health Services
Correctional Leaders Association
Council of State Governments Justice Center
International Community Justice Association
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States
Major Cities Chiefs Association
Major County Sheriffs of America
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association of Counties
National Association of Police Organizations
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Criminal Justice Association

National District Attorneys Association
National League of Cities
National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition
National Sheriffs' Association
Police, Treatment, and Community Collaborative
TASC, Inc. (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities)
Treatment Communities of America
United States Conference of Mayors

STATE/REGIONAL/LOCAL AND PRACTITIONER ORGANIZATIONS

Community in Crisis/Connection, Bernardsville, New Jersey
Dismas Charities, Inc.
Hope House Treatment Centers (Maryland)
Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association
Montgomery County (Maryland) Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc.
New Jersey Association of Mental Health Agencies, Inc.
New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
Serenity Now Nar-Anon Group of Lake Helen, Florida
Sandra A. Springer, MD, Professor of Medicine, Yale School of Medicine

ⁱ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/criminal-justice>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2019/07/importance-treating-opioid-use-disorder-in-justice-system>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20211117.htm

^{iv} https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20211117.htm

^v <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>