

U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Braun, Whitehouse and Brown: Lead Senate Introduction of Bipartisan Medicaid Reentry Act

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 10, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Mike Braun (R-IN), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) are leading the Senate introduction of the bipartisan *Medicaid Reentry Act*, legislation expanding access to addiction treatment and other health services for Medicaid-eligible individuals 30 days before their release from jail or prison. The bipartisan legislation is also being re-introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressmen Paul Tonko (D-NY-20) and Michael Turner (R-OH-10).

Currently, federal statute prohibits any form of federal health coverage for incarcerated individuals except under very limited circumstances. In most states, Medicaid coverage is immediately terminated when someone is sent to a correctional setting. This creates a serious coverage gap when individuals are released, as they often have no access to health care or addiction treatment during a stressful and dangerous time. This bill is a bipartisan response to this issue, following alarming evidence published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) that individuals reentering society are **129 times likelier** than the general population to die of a drug overdose during the first two weeks after release.

“The opioid and substance use disorder epidemic remains rampant in Wisconsin and across the country, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is dramatically impacting the addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery landscape in this country. This problem is harshly affecting incarcerated individuals who are working to reenter society, but currently lack the health care coverage they need to continue their

recovery,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “We need to make sure these rehabilitated folks have Medicaid or other health care coverage needed to seamlessly transition back to community care, and reduce the risk of overdose deaths post-release. I’m proud to work with my Senate and House colleagues on this bipartisan reform to address our nation’s addiction crisis and support our continued fight against this deadly epidemic.”

“In their first two weeks after release from incarceration, ex-convicts are 129 times more likely than the general public to die from a drug overdose. The *Medicaid Reentry Act* seeks to tackle the epidemics of opioid overdoses and recidivism after release from prison by resuming benefits for Medicaid-eligible individuals 30 days before they are released to avoid a gap in coverage,” **said Senator Braun**

“Rhode Island’s experience shows incarcerated individuals are less likely to reoffend if there is good preparation for their transition back to their community, including access to substance use treatment and other medical and mental health services,” **said Senator Whitehouse.** “A successful transition out of the prison system is good for society, good for the individual, and good for taxpayers.”

“Reentry after incarceration is a critical time in the lives of those working to get back on their feet. Many often struggle with mental health and substance use disorder diagnoses, and any gap in coverage could prevent these individuals from accessing the treatment and health care services they need,” **said Senator Brown.** “Everyone should have a right to quality, affordable healthcare.”

“As we continue to grapple with scary new developments in the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must be even more vigilant in our fight against the nation’s opioid crisis,” **Congressman Tonko said.** “My *Medicaid Reentry Act* takes swift needed action to combat the spread of addiction and target treatment to the people who face the most immediate danger. Empowering states to use the best tools available to close the deadly treatment gap gives us our best chance to save lives and stop this crisis. America’s opioid epidemic is still raging. Taking swift, bold action now will make our communities safer, reduce the burden on public services over the long term and target life-saving services to the people and families who are most at risk. We have never faced a more urgent moment to advance the *Medicaid Reentry Act* and deliver treatment that allows individuals to find and follow the path to recovery. I am profoundly grateful to my colleagues from both parties who have been steadfast in supporting this legislation, and I look forward to working with them to advance this life-saving bill without delay.”

“With COVID-19 and opioid related deaths on the rise, reintroducing the *Medicaid Reentry Act* couldn’t come at a more critical time. This legislation will provide a vital pathway to addiction treatment for incarcerated individuals who are at grave risk of dying from an opioid overdose following their release,” **said Congressman Turner**. “After many years of advocating to address this serious issue, I appreciate Senator Baldwin’s leadership, and I am proud to join her in this bipartisan effort which will work towards combatting the deadly opioid epidemic.”

Specifically, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* will:

- Grant new flexibility to restart benefits for Medicaid-eligible incarcerated individuals 30 days pre-release;
- Make it easier for states to coordinate effective addiction treatment and other health services, allowing for a warm handoff to community care and a reduced risk of overdose deaths post-release; and
- Ensure a smooth transition back to Medicaid for those who are already eligible for Medicaid coverage.

In Wisconsin, Senator Baldwin’s *Medicaid Reentry Act* has earned the support of Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley and Dane County Sheriff Dave Mahoney.

“The *Medicaid Reentry Act* is an important piece of legislation that can save lives through continued coverage of effective addiction treatment options for individuals reentering the community,” **said Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley**. “The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the unique vulnerabilities individuals facing substance use disorder face upon release. In December, Milwaukee County saw a 108 percent increase in calls into Emergency Medical Services related to overdoses compared to 2019 – with more than 40 percent of those calls coming from Black residents – capping a tragic, year-long trend of increasing overdose calls to EMS in 2020. The data underscores the immediate need for legislation to help ensure uninterrupted and comprehensive coverage is available to our most vulnerable residents.”

Dane County Sheriff Dave Mahoney, who is also President of the National Sheriffs Association, said today he was pleased to lend the Sheriffs’ strong support of The *Medicaid Reentry Act*. “This legislation will allow Medicaid to

cover the last thirty days of medical assistance for incarcerated individuals. This is an important part of the continuum of care for those with medical needs. In the long run this will reduce recidivism and therefore ease budgetary burdens from the jail system. Our taxpayers deserve that," **said Sheriff Mahoney.**

A broad coalition of national organizations support the *Medicaid Reentry Act*, including A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing), American Jail Association, The American Osteopathic Academy of Addiction Medicine, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, American Society of Addiction Medicine, The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, Central City Concern, CleanSlate Centers, Community Catalyst, Community Oriented Correctional Health Services (COCHS), HIV Medicine Association, International Community Corrections Association, The Kennedy Forum, Legal Action Center, Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA), McShin Foundation, National Association of Counties (NACo), National Association for Behavioral Healthcare, National Council for Behavioral Health, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), National Health Care for the Homeless Council, The National Safety Council, National Sheriffs Association, Shatterproof, The Student Coalition on Addiction (SCA), Treatment Communities of America, Well Being Trust, and the Infectious Diseases Society of America.

"Addiction doesn't disappear behind bars, yet evidence-based addiction treatment is still too difficult to access for incarcerated individuals," **said Paul H. Earley, MD, president of the American Society of Addiction Medicine.** "During the first two weeks of reentry, people are 129 times more likely to die of a drug overdose and are at significantly higher risk of suicide, underscoring the need to ensure coordinated care during such a vulnerable time. We commend these bipartisan leaders for introducing the *Medicaid Reentry Act* and urge Congress to pass this critical legislation quickly in order to reduce the risk of overdose and ultimately save lives."

"The *Medicaid Reentry Act* is a critical part of our nation's response to growing mental health and substance use crises, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic," **said Vikki Wachino, CEO of Community Oriented Correctional Health Services and former Deputy Administrator and Director of the Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services at CMS.** "Health care continuity as people prepare to return to their families and communities will improve the lives of millions of people, and

achieve better public health, public safety, and equity.”

“People with substance use and other psychiatric disorders need continuity of treatment. Ensuring that people who’ve been incarcerated can continue to access health care when they return to the community will save lives,” **said American Psychiatric Association President Jeffrey Geller, M.D., M.P.H.** “Given the pandemic and the increase in overdose deaths we’re seeing overall, particularly among people who are incarcerated, we urge Congress to pass the *Medicaid Reentry Act*.”

“The Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy leads to an interruption in access to needed medical, mental health, and addiction treatment for jail inmates who disproportionately suffer from chronic medical conditions and substance use disorders,” **said National Association of Counties Executive Director Matthew Chase.** “The MIEP leads to poorer health outcomes and higher recidivism rates. NACo applauds the reintroduction of the *Medicaid Reentry Act*, a key measure in strengthening counties’ ability to connect people to critical health care as they leave incarceration, including advancing connections to COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccinations and other services needed to protect their health, and the health of the community.”

More information about the legislation is available [here](#).