

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS, INC.

Representing America's Finest

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Executive Director

August 12, 2013

The Honorable Tom Coburn
United States Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Coburn:

On behalf of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO), representing 241,000 rank-and-file officers from across the United States, I am writing to urge you to lift your hold on S.162, the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act (JMHCRA), sponsored by Senators Al Franken (D-MN) and Mike Johanns (R-NE). This bipartisan legislation reauthorizes the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) and improves responses to people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system. The bill has 30 Senate cosponsors and was overwhelmingly approved on a bipartisan vote by the Senate Judiciary Committee in June 2013.

Increasing numbers of people with mental illnesses are coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The impact of this trend on people's lives, public safety, the administration of the criminal justice system, and public expenditures is difficult to overstate.

NAPO is a strong supporter of the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCRA), which was created by the JMHCRA of 2004 in response to requests from state government officials to recommend improvements to the criminal justice system's response to people with mental illness. The JMHCRA enables criminal justice and mental health agencies to work together towards better outcomes. The JMHCRA assists law enforcement agencies across the United States in their responsibilities in assisting those, and dealing with citizens with mental health issues. Moreover, the JMHCRA strengthens public safety by providing training to law enforcement officers to help them identify and improve their responses to people with mental illnesses.

In addition to law enforcement officer training, MIOTCRA grants provide for the establishment and expansion of mental health courts, mental health treatment resources for jails and prisons, and other collaborative approaches. Since 2006, more than 450 grants have been awarded across 49 U.S. state and territories.

This legislation further strengthens the program by providing additional resources for veterans treatment courts to help veterans suffering from

behavioral or post-traumatic stress disorders; providing for treatment and transitional programs in correctional facilities; creating resources for communities to better address “high utilizers” of public services; offering training during police academies and orientations; and promoting the use of evidence-based practices.

We hope you will consider lifting your hold on the JMHCA and letting it proceed through the legislative process. By doing so, you will be giving officials in Oklahoma who represent criminal justice and mental health agencies the tools they need to increase public safety, reduce spending, and improve the prospects of recovery for its justice-involved individuals. If NAPO can provide any additional information, please feel free to contact me at: (703) 549-0775.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William J. Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William J. Johnson
Executive Director