

Thomas M. Susman
Director
Governmental Affairs Office

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
740 Fifteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005-1022
(202) 662-1760
FAX: (202) 662-1762
SusmanT@staff.abanet.org

June 11, 2009

The Honorable Andre Carson
U.S. House of Representatives
425 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Kennedy
U.S. House of Representatives
407 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pete Stark
U.S. House of Representatives
239 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Carson, Kennedy and Stark:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA) to express our strong support for the Recidivism Reduction Act, legislation that will provide vital help to offenders attempting to successfully reenter society and avoid further contact with the criminal justice system.

High rates of recidivism have plagued the criminal justice system. According to Department of Justice studies, fully two-thirds of prisoners released from prisons will be rearrested within three years. Recidivism is a particular problem among mentally ill offenders, who make up a disproportionate number of inmates in correctional facilities. In fact, 81% of mentally ill inmates have had prior contact with the criminal justice system.

Arrests of these individuals are often directly linked to poverty and inadequate mental health treatment. Because federal entitlement programs such as SSI, SSDI and Medicaid are often their main sources of income and health care support, these inmates require immediate restoration of their benefits when they are released in order to successfully reenter their community and access the health care that they depend upon.

Yet, due to barriers in the law, most offenders do not receive their entitled benefits upon release and often have to wait as much as three months to get them restored. Without these benefits, offenders are forced to live under the same conditions that precipitated

their prior arrest. As a result, many commit another crime and end up back in prison, creating a cycle from which few offenders – especially those with mental illness – have little chance of escaping.

Enactment of the Recidivism Reduction Act would help break this cycle by allowing eligible offenders to reenter the community with necessary income support and health coverage. This support allows individuals to obtain shelter and essential health care so they can begin to build successful lives and avoid further incarceration.

The ABA appreciates your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you to enact this legislation this Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas M. Susman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas M. Susman