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Law Enforcement Calls for Medication-Assisted Treatment Programs in Correctional Facilities

Criminal Justice Leaders Endorse Harm Reduction Approaches to Save Lives, Improve Public Safety

Today, 57 law enforcement and criminal justice leaders, including 35 elected sheriffs and prosecutors, signed a letter in support of expanding the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for individuals with opioid use disorder in jails and prisons. MAT provides medications such as suboxone and methadone to help reduce opioid dependency and reduce the likelihood of illegal drug use. Additionally, the letter called for expanded access to naloxone and a continuing care plan for when inmates are released from custody – practices proven to reduce the risk of a fatal overdose.

“For too long we have tried to punish people into abstaining from drugs rather than expanding access to strategies that work, like medication-assisted treatment,” said **Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of [Fair and Just Prosecution](#)** and, along with the **[Law Enforcement Action Partnership](#)** (LEAP), one of the organizers of the sign-on letter. “Requiring people to be cut off from medically assisted treatment while in custody flies in the face of proven best practices and increases fatal overdoses when people reenter the community. It’s time for a different way forward – one that provides individuals with a healthy recovery plan and keeps communities safer and healthier.”

Noting extensive research that establishes the benefits of MAT to both the individual and the community – from increased long-term recovery success rates, to decreased crime and healthcare costs, to decreased likelihood of fatal overdose – current and former elected sheriffs, current elected prosecutors and other law enforcement professionals from around the nation signed on to the letter. Signatories include **Sheriffs Karl Leonard** (Chesterfield County, Virginia), **Ed Gonzalez** (Harris County, Texas), and **Joe Pelle** (Boulder County, Colorado); **Police Chief Chris Magnus** (Tucson, Arizona); **local elected prosecutors John Creuzot** (Dallas County, Texas), **Michael Dougherty** (Boulder, Colorado), **Sarah George** (Chittenden County, Vermont), **Christian Gossett** (Winnebago County, Wisconsin), **Andrea Harrington** (Berkshire County, Massachusetts), **Lawrence Krasner** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), **Beth McCann** (Denver, Colorado), **Rachael Rollins** (Suffolk County, Massachusetts), **Dan Satterberg** (King County, Washington), **Carol Siemon** (Ingham County,

Michigan), **David Sullivan** (Northwestern District, Massachusetts), **Cyrus Vance** (New York County, New York), and **Andrew Warren** (13th Judicial Circuit, Florida); and **Attorneys General TJ Donovan** (Vermont), **Kathleen Jennings** (Delaware), **Peter Neronha** (Rhode Island), and **Karl Racine** (District of Columbia).

“Modern corrections is no longer just detention of accused or sentenced individuals. Society demands that we also serve as a hospital, mental health institution, school and rehabilitation center. Providing adequate and responsible healthcare to treat addiction through medication-assisted treatment is a requirement, not an option,” said **Richard Van Wickler, Superintendent of the Cheshire County Department of Corrections in New Hampshire and speaker for LEAP**, a non-profit of law enforcement officials who work to improve the criminal justice system.

The letter comes at an opportune moment as the entire country grapples with increased fatal opioid overdoses and many cities across the country are considering or implementing harm reduction approaches to substance use. One setting where harm reduction strategies, such as MAT, are often lacking, however, is in jails and prisons. Lack of access to MAT persists despite significant evidence demonstrating the consequences of denying adequate medical care to people in correctional institutions, including the health risks of detoxing while in custody and the danger of overdose upon release. According to a [report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control, approximately one in 10 overdose deaths showed evidence of the individual having been released from an institutional setting in the month preceding their death.

Signatories of the letter cited their role as guardians of public safety as the reason for the joint letter, as well as the need to effectively respond to the opioid crisis that is devastating communities across the country.

“A prosecutor’s role does not end at the prison door,” said **Sarah George, Chittenden County State’s Attorney**. “As members of the community tasked with enhancing public safety, we are obligated to use our voices to ensure in those instances when people absolutely must be incarcerated, they leave custody in a position to safely reenter their communities.”

More MAT programs are being implemented in jails and prisons, such as in Boulder, Colorado.

“The Boulder County Jail recognizes the importance of MAT programming in the correctional setting to improve treatment outcomes, reduce recidivism and save lives,” explained **Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle**. “We continue treatment for inmates who are already in a MAT program upon their arrival, assess their needs and refer them to treatment, educate them and provide naloxone kits for inmates at risk of overdose upon release. We are actively working to implement a comprehensive Medication-Assisted Treatment program as early as summer 2019.”

Read the full letter with list of signatories [here](#).

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Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP’s work, visit www.fairandjustprosecution.org or follow us on Facebook [@FairAndJustProsecution](https://www.facebook.com/FairAndJustProsecution).

The Law Enforcement Action Partnership ([LEAP](#)) is a nonprofit group of police, judges, prosecutors and other criminal justice professionals who use their expertise to advance public safety solutions. LEAP's more than 230 law enforcement representatives from diverse backgrounds speak on behalf of thousands of law enforcement professionals across the U.S. For more on our work, visit our blog [Just Solutions](#), featuring expert law enforcement commentary on the most pressing issues in criminal justice, policing and drug policy.