



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Sheriff Koutoujian, Senator Jehlen, Representative Vieira announce passage of legislation to foster greater continuity of care for the justice-involved

Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian, State Senator Patricia Jehlen (D- Somerville) and State Representative David Vieira (R- East Falmouth) today announced the passage of legislation designed to foster greater continuity of care for those involved with the criminal justice system.

The legislation – included in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget and now awaiting the Governor's signature – will allow the MassHealth benefits of those sent to Massachusetts jails, prisons and houses of correction to be indefinitely suspended rather than terminated during their incarceration.

Though this may seem a small technical change, it will have a significant impact on some of the most daunting public health and safety issues confronting the Commonwealth today, including increased opiate abuse and the lack of resources for the mentally ill.

"While just two percent of the Commonwealth's population is uninsured today, a full 25 percent of our sentenced population reports being uninsured," said Sheriff Koutoujian. "With an inmate population where 40 percent have open mental health cases and 80 percent self-identify with substance abuse issues, passage of this legislation will have a tremendous impact on their continuity of care, our ability to positively impact public safety and ultimately save taxpayer dollars."

"We are excited about the significant savings to the state, but this is about more than just saving money. It also removes an unnecessary hurdle to those who are already facing so many obstacles," said Senator Jehlen. "It's good for public health, and it's good for people who are trying to get over substance abuse or mental health problems. It makes it easier for all who are involved, both on the side of the correctional facilities and the inmates."

“I am pleased we were able to get this amendment passed with bipartisan support in both chambers. This change is both fiscally responsible by transferring eligible inpatient healthcare costs to Medicaid from current correctional budgets and policy smart by taking one of our most at need populations and making sure they have the healthcare services they need upon release,” said Representative Vieira. “Sheriff Koutoujian and I have been pursuing this option since the Section 22 Special Commission issued its report in September 2013, and we found strong supporters in Sen. Jehlen and Senate President Therese Murray.”

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) individuals at, or below, 133 percent of the federal poverty level are now eligible for MassHealth and, with it, expanded substance abuse and mental health services. Many of the newly eligible – and those most in need of the services – are individuals involved with the criminal justice system.

The legislation would also allow any eligible inmate to apply for MassHealth benefits while incarcerated so their insurance would be immediately activated upon release from prison.

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