

Canceled DOJ Grants Threaten Bipartisan Work to Support People Released from Prison

The cuts undermine public safety and years of bipartisan cooperation on state and federal reentry work.



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Criminal Justice

Republicans and Democrats have long agreed on the need to help people leaving incarceration find work and stable housing so they can contribute to their communities and avoid returning to crime. But in April, the Trump administration terminated grants initially valued at \$40 million aimed at implementing the bipartisan Second Chance Act

— a law first championed by President George W. Bush — which seeks to improve outcomes for people returning from prison and jail.

Every year, more than 450,000 people [leave prison](#) ^[link-1] and return to their communities, and millions more pass through local

jails, typically staying for just over a month. The Justice Department's cuts affect not just these people but their families and communities as well.

While some key federal support for reentry remains, it rests on shakier ground — both politically, as cross-partisan support seems suddenly more tenuous, and programmatically, with money and talent leaving the field.

Undermining Decades of Bipartisan Support

Congress has funded work to support people returning home from prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities since passing the Second Chance Act in 2008. The legislation, first proposed in President Bush's [2004 State of the Union address](#) [\[link-3\]](#), created [new grant](#)

This analysis describes how the Justice Department's grant terminations threaten to upend the decades-long bipartisan consensus that providing federal resources to support and scale successful reentry programs is critical to reducing recidivism. It is part of a [series](#) [\[link-2\]](#) examining how these and other federal grant cancellations undermine public safety and justice.

[programs](#) [\[link-4\]](#) and directed federal funding to help remove barriers to housing, education, and employment for individuals leaving incarceration. It also enhanced behavioral health treatment and other support services. The Second Chance Act has allowed [states](#) [\[link-5\]](#) to experiment with new strategies to reduce recidivism as well as to invest more heavily in those proven to be effective.

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Effects of Federal Funding Cuts on Public Safety ▶

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That work continued in subsequent administrations. President Obama established the [Federal Interagency Reentry Council](#) [\[link-9\]](#) to coordinate and maximize federal resources across more than 20 federal agencies to support successful reentry. And in his first term, President Trump signed [the](#)

[First Step Act](#) [\[link-10\]](#) of 2018. The law reduced outdated, excessively punitive federal drug sentences and created new opportunities and tools focused on ensuring successful reentry upon release. To be sure, those reforms have not lived up to their full potential, suffering from [inadequate funding](#) [\[link-11\]](#), technical problems, and overly rigid [implementing regulations](#) [\[link-12\]](#). But even so, the law largely remains [a bipartisan success story](#) [\[link-13\]](#), and the current administration's Bureau of Prisons says it remains [committed to implementing it fully](#) [\[link-14\]](#). The First Step Act also reauthorized and expanded on the Second Chance Act and its grant programs. Building on these efforts, President Biden created the [Federal Interagency Alternatives and Reentry Committee](#) [\[link-15\]](#), tasking federal agencies with developing plans to support

rehabilitation during incarceration and facilitate reentry, among other goals.

This long-running bipartisan history, plus Attorney General Pam Bondi's [public support](#) [link-16] for

Hampering Effective Reentry Programs

Ensuring successful reentry and [reducing recidivism](#) [link-18] are vital for protecting public safety and promoting thriving families and communities. Terminating Second Chance Act grants undermines that work.

Many if not most of these terminations affected nonprofit organizations that provide training and technical assistance on reentry to state and local leaders across the country and of all political alignment. These cuts could drastically reduce the ability of local

reentry programs at her confirmation hearing, makes the Justice Department's April [cancellation](#) [link-17] of \$40 million in Second Chance Act grants all the more surprising.

governments and communities to create effective and efficient reentry programming.

Technical assistance fills an important gap in criminal justice program implementation. State and local organizations, which know their communities well, are often best positioned to match people leaving incarceration with transitional housing, post-release health care and counseling, and job services. But building these programs from the ground up is neither easy nor straightforward. Technical assistance providers can offer expertise, research, and connections to troubleshoot common problems and build

organizational capacity for local correctional institutions and community reentry providers.

For example, they can help scale initiatives that work. Reentry resources are frequently fragmented across multiple government agencies and community service organizations. Expert technical assistance providers bring extensive professional networks and experience in bridging those gaps, ensuring service providers and government partners work closely on referrals and case management. They can also provide guidance on methods for evaluating program performance and sustaining successful programs during changes in local leadership or external circumstances, as well as beyond time-limited federal investments. These are gaps that

the DOJ itself is neither sufficiently staffed nor well-positioned to fill on its own.

Terminating technical assistance forces those working directly with formerly incarcerated people to forgo guidance on everything from setting up effective and sustainable programs to collecting and analyzing performance data. In practical terms, without this support, organizations are less likely to successfully implement reentry service models and more likely to spend federal money inefficiently. That will leave people exiting prisons and jails with fewer opportunities for housing, health care, job training, and other support that together help reduce recidivism and decrease strain on local law enforcement, public health, and corrections agencies.

Stalling Bipartisan Congressional Goals

Of the \$40 million in lost Second Chance Act funding, roughly \$17 million originally went to four centers providing research, resources, and individualized support to Second Chance Act grantees. Three of those now-shuttered centers focused on specific policy goals: ensuring continuity between reentry services provided in jails and prisons with those available post-release; improving access to housing, health, and social services during reentry; and advancing education and employment opportunities for individuals returning to their communities.

Each of these issues has long been a priority shared by members of both parties and leaders across civil society. They advance [Congress's](#)

[stated goals](#) [\[link-19\]](#) of reducing recidivism and enhancing public safety. For example, [expanding health care](#) [\[link-20\]](#) for returning citizens who suffer from high rates of physical and behavioral health conditions can reduce unnecessary health crises, decrease emergency room visits, and improve public safety. Ensuring [housing stability](#) [\[link-21\]](#) for people leaving prison can [reduce their high risk](#) [\[link-22\]](#) of homelessness, as well as recidivism. During his first term, President Trump [signed a law](#) [\[link-23\]](#) restoring Pell Grant access to people in prison, to bipartisan praise. Prominent [business leaders](#) [\[link-24\]](#) continue to support [employment opportunities](#) [\[link-25\]](#) for people with criminal records.

The fourth center established by the Second Chance Act served as a public knowledge base on reentry. The [National Reentry Resource](#)

[Center](#) [\[link-26\]](#) compiled lists of funding opportunities, success stories, and guidance that governments and service providers across the country could access for free — a virtual library of everything the nation knew about how to help people returning home from incarceration. Unfortunately, the DOJ's abrupt funding terminations ended all federal support for the resource center and future updates to the critical expertise and guidance it provided.

For example, the resource center offered a [toolkit](#) [\[link-27\]](#) and [guidance](#) [\[link-28\]](#) for jail and prison administrators to connect people leaving their facilities with Medicaid. People leaving prison are far more likely than the general population to have [complex physical and mental health needs](#) [\[link-29\]](#), including substance use disorders. Because federal law prohibits Medicaid payment for

most services provided during incarceration, many states terminate or suspend Medicaid for individuals while incarcerated, often leading to gaps in health care coverage upon release until their Medicaid is reactivated.

A new strategy called [Medicaid demonstration waivers](#) [\[link-30\]](#) can vastly simplify the post-release Medicaid reactivation process and [ensure continuous treatment](#) [\[link-31\]](#) after release. These waivers, a core element of the Substance Use Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act ([Support Act](#)) [\[link-32\]](#), signed into law by President Trump in 2018 with significant bipartisan support, reduce [recidivism](#) [\[link-33\]](#) and [overdose deaths](#) [\[link-34\]](#) for those exiting jails and prisons. States with leaders across the political spectrum have [applied for and](#)

[obtained these waivers](#) [\[link-35\]](#) .

But the process is difficult, time-consuming, and [bogged down](#) [\[link-36\]](#) by state and federal bureaucracy. Without continued and updated guidance from the National Reentry Resource Center, states have fewer resources to successfully obtain waivers.

DOJ cancelation of funding originally valued at \$12 million also impacted the Second Chance Act Community-Based Reentry Incubator [Initiative](#) [\[link-37\]](#) . The initiative [offers](#) [microgrants](#) [\[link-38\]](#) to small community and faith-based organizations, which have extensive knowledge of their communities' needs but may lack the experience

or staff to apply for federal funding. Money for these entrepreneurial programs was passed through established intermediary organizations that would also provide organizational support for incubator grantees. Among other things, these microgrants supported novel initiatives to address housing insecurity in communities across the country as well as programs aimed at people and constituencies with unique needs — such as women and racial or ethnic minorities. Most of the recipients had not received federal funding in the past and likely would not have been able to secure these microgrants without the incubator initiative.

Anticipating Challenges and Solutions

These cuts come as [the broader policy landscape](#) [\[link-39\]](#) is expected to make reentry even more difficult. For example, data consistently shows [high unemployment rates](#) [\[link-40\]](#) among formerly imprisoned people, especially in [the first year after release](#) [\[link-41\]](#) — a hardship Trump [acknowledged](#) [\[link-42\]](#) during his first term. As a result, new Medicaid [work requirements](#) [\[link-43\]](#) included in Congress’s July budget bill may cause formerly incarcerated people to [lose health care coverage](#) [\[link-44\]](#) soon after release, jeopardizing their access to mental health and substance use treatments. While these new requirements provide a temporary exemption for formerly

incarcerated people, it is far too short, lasting [just 90 days](#) [\[link-45\]](#) after release.

Cuts in other corners of the executive branch, whether to agency staff or grant programs, may also impede reentry by removing supports that people struggling with economic insecurity relied on. For example, the administration has [all but “dissolved” the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) [\[link-46\]](#), the federal agency tasked with mental health and addiction policy; [withheld](#) [\[link-47\]](#) and [threatened reductions](#) [\[link-48\]](#) in funding for homelessness assistance; and proposed [drastic cuts](#) [\[link-49\]](#) to workforce development programs. If the point of these moves was to cut costs, they could end up backfiring. Successful reentry programs can reduce the social costs of crime and the budgetary

expense of reincarceration, a point explored by White House economists during the [first Trump term](#) [\[link-50\]](#).

What can policymakers do to prevent these harms from materializing? The Justice Department should restore the terminated reentry grants and release new solicitations, which remained unavailable and several months late as of the time of publication. Future funding should also be stabilized. House leaders should pass the bill reauthorizing and extending the Second Chance Act that recently [cleared the Senate](#) [\[link-51\]](#). The bill enjoys [broad support](#) [\[link-52\]](#) among both parties, faith communities, law enforcement, and correctional administrators, and lawmakers should prioritize it. Congress should also ensure that any full-year budget legislation appropriates money for the Second Chance Act,

as proposed in recent [draft](#) [\[link-53\]](#) [legislation](#) [\[link-54\]](#) and consistent with [past funding levels](#) [\[link-55\]](#).

Also, state and local officials should work together — with federal agencies, nonprofits, and communities, if possible — to blunt the impact that federal funding cuts and federal policies such as the new Medicaid work requirements may have on people who were formerly incarcerated. For example, [longer-term exemptions](#) [\[link-56\]](#) may be available for people with substance use disorders, and helping people apply for and obtain those exemptions could prevent any lapse in health care access.

Helping people return to their communities after prison or jail requires sustained funding, expertise, and [coordination](#) [\[link-57\]](#) across all levels of government. Policymakers should

not turn their backs on that vital work.

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Links

link-1: leave prison <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/p23st.pdf?inline=1>

link-2: series <https://www.brennancenter.org/series/effects-federal-funding-cuts-public-safety>

link-3: 2004 State of the Union address <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html>

link-4: new grant programs <https://bja.ojp.gov/doc/sca-fact-sheet.pdf?inline=1>

link-5: states <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/StatesDeliverResults-2018.pdf?inline=1>

link-6: Image </series/effects-federal-funding-cuts-public-safety>

link-7: Effects of Federal Funding Cuts on Public Safety </series/effects-federal-funding-cuts-public-safety>

link-8: Social and Economic Harm <https://www.brennancenter.org/topics/criminal-justice/social-and-economic-harm>

link-9: Federal Interagency Reentry Council <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-releases-2016-federal-interagency-reentry-council-report>

link-10: the First Step Act <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/analyzing-first-step-acts-impact-criminal-justice>

link-11: inadequate funding <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/what-first-step-act-and-whats-happening-it>

link-12: implementing regulations <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/first-step-acts-prison-reforms>

link-13: a bipartisan success story <https://counciloncj.org/first-step-an-early-analysis-of-recidivism/>

link-14: committed to implementing it fully <https://www.bop.gov/news/20250714-director-marshall-launches-fsa-task-force.jsp>

link-15: Federal Interagency Alternatives and Reentry Committee <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/05/25/executive-order-on-advancing-effective-accountable-policing-and-criminal-justice-practices-to-enhance-public-trust-and-public-safety/>

link-16: public support <https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/attorney-general-pam-bondi-s-comments-on-addiction-and-reentry-services-during-senate-confirmation-h>

link-17: cancellation <https://counciloncj.org/doj-funding-update-a-deeper-look-at-the-cuts/>

link-18: reducing recidivism <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/2018-update-prisoner-recidivism-9-year-follow-period-2005-2014>

link-19: Congress's stated goals [https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=\(title:34%20section:60501%20edition:prelim\)%20OR%20\(granuleid:USC-prelim-title34-section60501\)&f=treesort&num=0&edition=prelim](https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=(title:34%20section:60501%20edition:prelim)%20OR%20(granuleid:USC-prelim-title34-section60501)&f=treesort&num=0&edition=prelim)

link-20: expanding health care <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7002937/>

link-21: housing stability <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/49f0895779c6b984a9261c96f747e707/reentry-housing-stability.pdf?inline=1>

link-22: reduce their high risk <https://www.urban.org/features/five-charts-explain-homelessness-jail-cycle-and-how-break-it>

link-23: signed a law <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/12/20/congress-pell-grant-prisoners-449364>

link-24: business leaders <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3>

link-25: employment opportunities <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/04/opinion/clean-slate-incarceration-work.html>

link-26: National Reentry Resource Center

<https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/NationalReentryResourceCenter.pdf?inline=1>

link-27: toolkit <https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/resources/toolkits/medicaid>

link-28: guidance https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Medicaid-Basics-for-Correctional-Leaders-and-Agencies_v8_508.pdf?inline=1

link-29: complex physical and mental health needs <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7002937/>

link-30: Medicaid demonstration waivers <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/section-1115-waiver-watch-medicaid-pre-release-services-for-people-who-are-incarcerated/>

link-31: ensure continuous treatment https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Medicaid-Section-1115-Report_Final_508.pdf?inline=1

link-32: (Support Act) <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ271/PLAW-115publ271.pdf?inline=1>

link-33: recidivism https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w31394/w31394.pdf?inline=1

link-34: overdose deaths <https://www.kff.org/quick-take/opioid-deaths-are-falling-though-proposed-medicaid-changes-could-disrupt-access-to-treatment/>

link-35: applied for and obtained these waivers <https://healthandreentryproject.org/medicaid-waivers/>

link-36: bogged down <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/what-correctional-agencies-need-to-know-about-the-medicaid-section-1115-reentry-demonstration-opportunity/>

link-37: Initiative <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/reentry-incubator/overview>

link-38: offers microgrants <https://counciloncj.org/small-grants-big-impact-how-microgrants-can-boost-community-safety-and-justice/>

link-39: the broader policy landscape <https://healthandreentryproject.org/the-obbbas-changes-to-medicaid-and-their-implications-for-continuity-of-care-at-reentry/>

link-40: high unemployment rates <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

link-41: the first year after release <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/06/business/economy/jobs-hiring-after-prison.html>

link-42: acknowledged <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-second-chance-hiring/>

link-43: work requirements <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/a-closer-look-at-the-work-requirement-provisions-in-the-2025-federal-budget-reconciliation-law/>

link-44: lose health care coverage <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2025/08/09/medicaid-prison-health-care>

link-45: just 90 days <https://healthandreentryproject.org/the-obbbas-changes-to-medicaid-and-their-implications-for-continuity-of-care-at-reentry/>

link-46: all but “dissolved” the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/06/06/nx-s1-5424670/rfk-jr-samhsa-mental-health-addiction-overdose-trump-budget-cuts>

link-47: withheld <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-03-06/us-nonprofits-say-3-6-billion-for-homelessness-isn-t-flowing>

link-48: threatened reductions <https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2025/10/27/congress/house-republicans-urge-caution-as-hud-proceeds-with-homeless-housing-program-cuts-00624185>

link-49: drastic cuts <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/blog/news/cuts-disguised-as-reform-how-the-2026-budget-undermines-workforce-development/>

link-50: first Trump term <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/cea-report-returns-investments-recidivism-reducing-programs/>

link-51: cleared the Senate <https://csgjusticecenter.org/2025/10/10/senate-passes-second-chance-reauthorization-act-of-2025/>

link-52: broad support <https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/5550420-reentry-support-improving-public-safety/>

link-53: draft <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2354/text?s=2&r=39&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22commerce%2C+justice%2C+science%22%7D>

link-54: legislation <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/5342?>

[q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22commerce%2C+justice%2C+science%22%7D&s=2&r=7](#)

link-55: past funding levels <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/4366/text>

link-56: longer-term exemptions <https://www.lac.org/assets/files/Protecting-People-with-SUDs-and-Formerly-Incarcerated-Individuals-from-Losing-Medicaid-Coverage.pdf?inline=1>

link-57: coordination <https://www.justice.gov/archives/reentry/roadmap-reentry>