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RE: ASAM Support for the Re-Entry Support Through Opportunities for Resources and Essentials (RESTORE) Act of 2023

Dear Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Scott, Chairwoman
Stabenow, and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), a national medical specialty society representing more than 7,000 physicians and associated health professionals who specialize in the prevention and treatment of addiction, I write to provide ASAM's support for the inclusion of the Re-Entry Support Through Opportunities for Resources and Essentials (RESTORE) Act of 2023 ([H.R. 3479/S.1753](#)) in the 2023 Farm Bill. The RESTORE Act would repeal the lifetime federal ban on individuals with felony drug convictions from receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In addition, it would allow individuals who are incarcerated to apply for SNAP benefits up to 30 days prior to release.

Over the years, this nation has taken a racially biased response to drug use. Federal and state responses to crack use in the 1980s and 1990s heavily invested in law enforcement approaches, which disproportionately impacted people of color. Conversely, three-quarters of federal funding to address the recent opioid overdose crisis, associated more closely with white people, has gone to research, treatment, and prevention.ⁱ To this day, people of color continue to be over-policed, targeted, and charged with felony drug violations and are then unable to access basic social services once released from incarceration.

This is particularly problematic because individuals who have been recently released from incarceration tend to be more vulnerable to food insecurity and other material hardships. One study in Rhode Island found that 70.4 percent of those on probation experienced food insecurity, compared to 12.8 percent of the general population.ⁱⁱ A recent study additionally found that being banned from food stamps results in a 1.5% increase in re-arrest over a 5 -year period.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, felony convictions dramatically impact employment opportunities. After release, only 55% of individuals who were formerly incarcerated have any earnings; those that do manage to secure a job tend to earn less than the pay of a full time job at the federal minimum wage.^{iv} This food insecurity and struggle to maintain gainful employment affect not only those who have been previously incarcerated, but also their children.^v

People with substance use disorder (SUD) often become involved in the criminal legal system resulting in a drug felony conviction. With the drug felony ban, people with SUD are denied public assistance that is critical to the public health goal of remission and recovery from the disease of addiction. Individuals with a history of SUD have heightened stress reactivity, which is part of the cycle that perpetuates compulsive behavior despite adverse consequences.^{vi} An inability to eat may exacerbate the stress response, impair the fragile process of recovery from SUD, and is a threat to maintaining a livelihood, which is a long-term recovery behavior. Removing barriers to SNAP, such as the drug felony ban, can assist with the stability people need to engage in addiction treatment, which can significantly aid the process of maintaining recovery.

By repealing the federal ban on SNAP benefits for those who have been convicted of a drug-related felony, Congress can improve the lives of millions of Americans. The SNAP program is one of the federal government's most powerful tools for fighting poverty, with one analysis finding that it kept 7.3 million people out of poverty in 2016, including 3.3 million children.^{vii} It is time for Congress to improve access to this program for those incarcerated due to felony drug convictions, so that their crimes do not permanently hinder their ability to lead successful and healthy lives.

We urge you to prioritize lifting the ban on SNAP for those with prior drug convictions by including the RESTORE Act in the 2023 Farm Bill. ASAM stands ready to work with you to ensure that more Americans reentering society can access the social services and support they need to succeed. Please reach out to Kelly Corredor, ASAM's Chief Advocacy Officer, at kcorredor@asam.org, with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Hurley', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Brian Hurley, MD, MBA, FAPA, DFASAM
President, American Society of Addiction Medicine

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- ⁱ Mullen S, Kruse LR, Goudsward AJ, and Bogues A. CRACK VS. HEROIN: An unfair system arrested millions of blacks, urged compassion for whites. *Asbury Park Press*. December 2, 2019. <https://www.app.com/in-depth/news/local/public-safety/2019/12/02/crack-heroin-race-arrests-blacks-whites/2524961002>
- ⁱⁱ Kimberly Dong, Alice Tang, Thomas Stopka, et al. Food acquisition methods and correlates of food insecurity in adults on probation in Rhode Island. *PLOS*. June 2018. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0198598>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sugie, Naomi F., and Carol Newark. "Welfare Drug Bans and Criminal Legal Cycling." *The University of Chicago Press Journals, American Journal of Sociology*. July 3023. www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/725424.
- ^{iv} Adam Looney and Nicholas Turner. *Work and Opportunity Before and After Incarceration*. The Brookings Institution. March 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/work-and-opportunity-before-and-after-incarceration/>
- ^v The Center for Law and Social Policy. *No More Double Punishments: Lifting the Ban on SNAP and TANF for People with Prior Felony Drug Convictions*. January 2021. Available at: <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/no-more-double-punishments>
- ^{vi} Kwako, Laura E., and George F. Koob. "Neuroclinical Framework for the Role of Stress in Addiction." *Chronic Stress* 1 (April 10, 2017): 2470547017698140. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2470547017698140>.
- ^{vii} Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. *Policy Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. (June 2019). Available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>