

## Over 1 Million Individuals with Mental Illnesses Strain our Criminal Justice System

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### **Co-Sponsor the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Reauthorization and Improvement Act of 2007**

Dear Colleague:

Sixteen percent of people under correctional supervision -- or over one million individuals -- suffer from a serious mental illness. The Los Angeles County Jail and New York's Rikers Island jail hold more people with mental illnesses than the largest psychiatric inpatient facilities in the United States.

- Many criminal justice agencies are not prepared to meet the comprehensive treatment and needs of individuals with mental illness.
- Law enforcement officers without appropriate training can be put in danger when interacting with individuals in crisis, and if they do not arrest such individuals, may spend crucial labor hours trying to connect them to treatment.
- Jails and prisons require extra staffing and treatment resources—such as high security cells and costly medications—for inmates with mental illness.

The Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program, which was created by the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-414), needs to be reauthorized and improved.

Programs like those funded by the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program can save taxpayers money, improve public safety, and link individuals with the treatment they need to become productive members of their community.

Crime Subcommittee Chairman Bobby Scott and Ranking Member Randy Forbes have introduced the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Reauthorization and Improvement Act of 2007.

The bill: (1) reauthorizes funding for collaborative adult and juvenile program grants for 2008 through 2013 and increases the authorized funding to \$75 million a year; (2) reauthorizes the Mental Health Courts Program; (3) reauthorizes and improves the mental health courts grant program; and (4) creates new programs to (a) improve law enforcement responses (including campus security) to mentally ill offenders; (b) improve treatment of female offenders with mental illnesses; (c) expand capabilities and effectiveness of correctional agencies' abilities to identify and treat mentally ill offenders; and (d) provide statewide planning grants for new interventions and treatment plans for mentally ill offenders.

If interested in co-sponsoring, please contact Bobby Vassar (5-6739) or Mike Volkov (5-6906).