

Levin Center 2022 Legislative Oversight Scenario

A 25-year-old man was paroled after 6 years behind bars. He is caught with illegal prescription drugs and could return to prison.

After six years of prison, Morgan Smith appeared ready to re-enter society. He had a job and housing lined up and was approved by Medicaid, awaiting his action to make his coverage active. While in prison, the first few years were rough with some misconduct tickets, but as he aged, he slowly became a model inmate who assisted the younger prisoners seeking their high school equivalency diplomas. He sought mental health assistance and regularly received care during his incarceration, including prescription psychotropic drugs. Among other prisoners and corrections officers he would at times get sad and suggest the world being a better place without him, especially when expressing remorse for the crimes he committed as a youth and the suffering he caused to his victims and to his family.

Once paroled, Smith was approved for Medicaid but never became active in coverage. As a result, he was unable to secure a new prescription for medication. Smith was recently arrested for illegal possession of anti-anxiety agents and stimulant prescription drugs, and is facing new felony charges and a return to prison.

“To release someone from prison and to place all of these barriers between them and something as essential as health insurance is a profound government failure.” says a statewide advocacy group’s spokesperson. “I hope to be part of the discussion on how to better ensure those on parole have access to their basic needs.”

In response, the local health department responsible for administering Medicaid says they are doing all they really can to ensure those vulnerable have access to care, but they need more resources and ultimately, cannot do everything for someone seeking coverage. “We are understaffed and underpaid, yet we hit well above our expected batting average when it comes to providing coverage for those in need. We do all we can to insist on coverage for

those qualified, but it is up to the individual to flip the switch. We are all concerned with government waste, and we must make sure those receiving Medicaid actually want and need it.”

In wake of this incident, there has been a call for oversight of the actions made by the Department of Corrections, the Department of Health and Human Services, the local government health department, and mental health care providers for those on Medicaid. The state legislature’s oversight committee has scheduled a hearing into this incident to gather facts on the process, and to see where there might be opportunities for reform.

2022 LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT WITNESS LIST:

- ACLU Representative
- Attorney General
- County Health Dept. Director
- MDOC Legislative Liaison
- MDHHS Legislative Liaison
- NAMI Representative
- Parole Officer Representative
- Criminal Justice Reform Advocate
- Prison Warden

